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A Cosmological Reformulation of Anselm's Proof That God Exists

By

Richard Campbell

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To the Honourable Kenneth John Crispin, QC, PhD
whose insistence on factual evidence provoked the writing of this book

∴

Potest tamen etiam rationabilis mens proficiens a parvis ad maiora et a visibilus ad invisibilia prevenire ad intellectum perfectiorem.

It is possible that a rational mind … by advancing from a knowledge of small to a knowledge of greater things, and from things visible to things invisible, may attain to an increasingly perfect understanding.

ORIGEN; *De Principiis*, IV, 10

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Preface

This is the third book I have written on the proof for the existence of God which Anselm presented in his *Proslogion*. I must say that I have surprised myself by having written three books about it. I first wrote a book examining Anselm's proof of the existence of God 47 years ago. It was published in 1976 as *From Belief to Understanding*. Since so much had been published on Anselm's proof since then, I engaged with much of that secondary literature and published a much more thorough analysis of that proof, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, published in 2018. So, why now a third?

I was prompted to write this book because of my long-standing and close friendship with Ken Crispin, who has now retired after a long and distinguished career as a lawyer and judge of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory and President of its Court of Appeal. I have had many interesting and fruitful discussions with Ken as I was writing *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. He was intrigued by my engagement with this famous – or infamous – proof, but could not bring himself to accept that it is cogent. He insisted that he had spent his entire career dealing with issues of evidence, trying to distinguish between what is true, beyond reasonable doubt, in the evidence presented in court, and what is either misperception, misunderstanding, or a pack of lies. For Anselm to argue that having something in the understanding could entail that it is also in reality, without appealing to any factual evidence, violated the basic principle which had governed his whole professional life. No amount of discussion and logical demonstrations could shake that basic conviction. Since I very much respect my friend's integrity, I began to ponder whether there might be some way of deducing Anselm's conclusions from factual evidence, rather than from Anselm's first establishing that something than which a greater cannot be thought is 'in the understanding'.

So I found myself writing yet another book on Anselm's proof. It is therefore appropriate that I dedicate it to Ken, since his scepticism is what provoked me to write it. I do not do so in order to convince him to change his beliefs, for I agree with Anselm that it is one thing to understand an argument, but another to believe its conclusions. But I do lay before him, and what I hope is a much wider audience, an argument which proves that God exists based on the evidence of the most universal fact about the universe, evidence which has been confirmed by modern cosmology.

In the course of writing this book I have had useful exchanges by email with a number of other scholars who have made contributions to our better understanding of Anselm's proof. I would like to thank John Demetracopoulos for sharing the results of his research and reflections on the historical precursors

of the descriptive phrase which is so crucial to Anselm's proof. I thank Ian Logan and Christian Tapp for sharing their thoughts on aspects of this argument, and Marek Otisk for responding to my request for a copy of the paper he had written in Czech. Geo Siegwart also asked me to comment on a paper he had drafted, which led to a fruitful exchange of ideas, and his reading and making detailed comments on some of my draft chapters. I am grateful to him for saving me from making some logical errors. I also thank my colleague Peter Roeper for his advice on some questions of formal logic.

The most significant exchange, however, arose from my being contacted by Bernd Goebel, who wrote to me spontaneously to raise some difficulties he found with the exegesis I had presented in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. I am so grateful for his feedback, for considering the points he raised resulted in my realizing that for forty years I had misinterpreted the status of the key premise upon which Anselm relies to prove that God truly exists. That led me to develop a completely new account of how Anselm establishes that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is the God in whom he believes. My respect for Anselm's extraordinary intelligence just keeps growing. My own thinking has been expanded in unexpected ways by my engaging with his.

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of a draft of this book who recommended that I radically restructure that draft before resubmitting it for publication. That was not an easy task, but I believe that it has resulted in a much better and more integrated book.

I was delighted to learn that Sigbjorn Sonnesyn had been appointed by the publisher Brill as the copy editor of my manuscript. For when he was performing that same role with the manuscript of *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* he had made a number of helpful suggestions about how some difficult passages in Anselm's Latin text might be more appropriately translated and some insightful comments on issues of interpretation. As expected, he did the same again with this book, and I thank him for doing so.

The person to whom I owe more than I can adequately express is my wife Petra. She has been my muse throughout the writing of both *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* and of this book. Time and again, she encouraged me to explore many issues more thoroughly than I had initially. Her commitment to reading and commenting on drafts and redrafts after redrafts has been patient and whole-hearted; her identification of typing mistakes and infelicities of expression has been perceptive; and her recommendations about how draft chapters could be improved were always constructive and made with sensitivity and wisdom. Her suggestions have led to many amendments and major restructuring of the text until it has reached this form in which I now submit it to the world. This book is the product of an enriching partnership which I have been given the grace to share for 34 years.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing Anselm's Original Proof

Anyone who has ever flipped through a textbook on the philosophy of religion, or read books or articles about 'the ontological argument', or surfed the internet searching for "the ontological argument" or "Anselm" will have come across a purported proof of the existence of God written by a medieval monk named "Anselm". So controversial is this proof that it was challenged within his own lifetime, and it continues to provoke vigorous debate between its critics and defenders. Indeed, at least ten full-length books dealing with aspects of this argument have been published in the past 14 years.

Anselm presented this argument in a work named *Proslogion*, which he wrote in the year 1078.[1] It consists of 26 mostly short sections, which are simply numbered, although between the Preface and the text proper he provided a list of brief 'headings' beside each number, rather like a modern table of contents. In *Proslogion* 11 he presented what today we call a deduction which is almost universally held to be the very paradigm of the so-called 'ontological argument for the existence of God'. That label was introduced by Immanuel Kant in the 18th Century to describe the arguments for the existence of God presented some years before by René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz, and debated by their followers. Yet the deduction which Anselm presented in *Proslogion* 11, more than six centuries earlier, is nowadays classified under that same label, for all that it is fundamentally different.

For nearly 50 years I have maintained that:

(i) While Anselm does claim to have proven that God truly exists, that proof is *not* confined to *Proslogion* 11 and so is *not* the one which has traditionally, and is nowadays almost universally, attributed to him;

1 The translation of passages from Anselm's texts is based on the Latin transcription provided by Ian Logan of a manuscript probably written between 1107 and 1114 at Christ Church Priory, Canterbury; see Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion: The History and Anselm's Argument and its Significance Today*. He says that the text of this manuscript is almost identical to the critical edition produced by F.S. Schmitt; cf., Anselm, *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt. Vols. 1–5 of 6. I always take Logan's translation into account even where I prefer to translate some sentence somewhat differently. To distinguish clearly what Anselm himself wrote from what others have written, and from my reconstruction of the steps by which Anselm appears to have inferred the propositions he writes, I use italics to highlight direct quotations from Anselm's writings.

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(ii) Anselm does not deduce any of his conclusions from a supposed 'definition of' – or a 'conceptual truth about' – God as "something than which nothing greater could be thought", as is standardly misreported. On the contrary, that identity is a *conclusion* which Anselm validly deduces in *Proslogion* III;
(iii) Anselm articulates that proof over three logically connected stages, in each of which he validly deduces conclusions built on the conclusion of the previous stage;
(iv) Contrary to what was alleged in his lifetime and often repeated in modern times, the proof he presented in the *Proslogion* is unique in the sense that while it succeeds in proving the existence of God, it could not be adapted to prove the existence of anything else.

In this book I shall show, in addition, that:

(a) His original proof never was a version of the so-called 'ontological argument' for the existence of God because such an argument is purely *a priori*, whereas, for him, the description – "something than which a greater cannot be thought" – which is central to his proof, is itself grounded in reality and the crucial premise which enables him to validly deduce that God exists is not a truth known *a priori*.
(b) Taking a cue from (iii), Anselm's three-stage proof can be reformulated by deploying that same description, together with his argumentative strategies, his rules of inference, and his basic concepts, in a way which enables the conclusions of each of those three stages to be validly deduced from a premise which is supported by modern cosmology.
(c) Anselm defended his proof against the objection that his proof must be fallacious because it purports to deduce the existence of God from a thought. But in this cosmological reformulation of his proof the conclusions of all three stages of his proof will be inferred from factual evidence confirmed by modern cosmology – not from something being in the understanding.
(d) The crucial premise which enables Anselm to prove that God truly exists – that "*Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist*" – can be justified on the strongest possible grounds.
(e) The God whose existence Anselm proves in *Proslogion* III is the God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.
(f) The proposition that "*You are* something *than which nothing greater could be thought*" is the single reason which "*would need no other*

than itself alone for proving itself and for demonstrating alone that God truly exists, and … whatever we believe about the divine substance".

(g) Therefore, far from being a quaint but intriguing relic from medieval ways of thinking, his proof engages with issues at the heart of both contemporary science and contemporary philosophy.

Since the premise of the Anselmian cosmological reformulation I am about to propose is supported by current cosmology, demonstrating all those contentions will demonstrate that all of the conclusions which he infers in the *Proslogion* – including that God exists – are established *a posteriori*, not *a priori*. Therefore, this reformulated proof will emerge as a *sui generis* version somewhat similar to the so-called '*cosmological* argument for the existence of God', but more subtle and more plausible than all those commonly so called.

1 Anselm's Objectives in Writing the *Proslogion*

Anselm says in the Preface of the *Proslogion*, which he wrote some years later than the main text, that initially he had intended to call this 'little work', *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* [*Faith Seeking Understanding*]. However he changed its title to *Proslogion*, a Greek word, to echo the title of an earlier work he called *Monologion*, which he had described as "An example of meditating on the rationality of faith". Because most of the 26 chapters which make up the *Proslogion* are written in first-to second-person discourse, the title "*Proslogion*" is apt, because it means, "An Address". The *Proslogion* is an extended prayer addressed to the God in whom Anselm believes. He could not be addressing anyone else!

Anselm explains in the Preface why, having completed his *Monologion*, he has written another work which deals with much the same topics, although in a quite different way. He says,

> *I reflected on the fact that it* [the *Monologion*] *was constructed by a linking together of many reasons* [multorum concatenatione contextum argumentorum]*, and began to ask myself whether a single reason* [unum argumentum] *could be discovered which would need no other than itself alone for proving itself* [ad se probandum] *and for demonstrating* [ad astruendum] *alone that God truly exists, and that He is the Supreme Good, needing*

> *nothing else, and whom all things need that they might exist and might exist well, and whatever else we believe about the divine substance.*[2]

There is no consensus as to what Anselm is referring to when he says that he was hoping to discover a '*unum argumentum*' which would fulfil all those objectives. That issue will be addressed in Chapter 11 after I have articulated the cosmological reformulation of his proof of the existence of God. In translating his phrase "*unum argumentum*" as "a single reason", I am anticipating what I will argue in Chapter 11. Translating "*argumentum*" that way takes heed to a definition of that word offered by the eclectic philosopher and orator Cicero, which was endorsed by Boethius, that

> *Argumentum autem rationem, quae ratio rei dubiae faciat fidem.*[3]
>
> An argument, however, is a reason which would produce belief regarding a thing in doubt.

When Anselm writes that he hoped to 'prove' all those beliefs, he does not mean that he wants to prove them in the strong sense in which theorems are proven from axioms in Euclidean geometry. Rather, when he uses that verb to describe conclusions he has deduced, it always occurs within the scope of "*quod dixit*" [what he has spoken of]. For Anselm, a conclusion is proven if it is validly deduced from what someone has actually said. He always insists that statements be *owned* by someone. A notable example of Anselm's insistence that assertions be owned is that when another monk wrote a critique of Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* 11, *On Behalf of the Fool*, Anselm began his *Reply* by writing,

> *Since it is not the Fool ... who criticizes me with these words, but someone who is not a fool but a Catholic, speaking on behalf of the Fool, may it suffice to reply to the Catholic.*

To claim to prove that something could 'prove itself', and would demonstrate alone that God truly exists, and those other objectives is an extraordinarily

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2 This is my own translation of this passage. Most translators render *argumentum* as "argument".

3 The writings of Cicero (106–43 BC) were highly respected throughout the medieval period and had an immense influence on the Latin language. As noted in §1.1, Cicero proposes that definition in his *Topica* 2, 8. Boethius adopts that definition in *In Ciceronis Topica* I 2,7. The passage is quoted in Toivo J. Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion: *Argument, Devotion and Rhetoric*, p. 76.

ambitious undertaking. No-one before him had dared to present a deduction to prove that God exists. Augustine, in his *De Libero Arbitrio*, had presented to his interlocutor, Evodius, reasons to believe that God exists, but that dialogue did not even purport to present a deductively valid argument. Anselm's project was ground-breaking.

His friend and biographer, Eadmer, wrote a vivid description of Anselm's struggles to find this 'single reason':

> And this, as he himself would say, gave him great trouble, partly because thinking about it took away his desire for food, drink, and sleep, and partly – and this was more grievous to him – because it disturbed the attention which he ought to have paid to matins and to Divine services at other times.[4]

Eadmer reports that as Anselm became aware that his quest was becoming so disruptive, and as he found that he still could not entirely lay hold on what he sought, he made up his mind to banish the whole idea; he even suspected that the very idea of it was a temptation by the Devil! But the harder he tried to rid himself of this idea, the more it pursued him, until something happened at the evening vigil in the monastery's chapel. Based on Eadmer's biography and other sources, Martin Rule has written an imaginative reconstruction of what happened next:

> The more he struggled to keep it aloof, the more importunately did it assail him, until one night at matins, when in the very agony of his effort to ward it off and follow the office undisturbed, suddenly the light broke in upon him; the argument he had sought displayed itself clear and bright in his mental vision, 'and his inmost soul was deluged with unspeakable joy and gladness'. As he stood in his stall in the sombre gloom of the scarcely illuminated choir, his large white hood drawn over his head, none observed his emotion, or saw the tears that rolled down his thin ethereal face, or dreamed that he, their prior, had decried and grasped a proof of the existence of God which should henceforth throughout all time compel the wonder and admiration of our race.[5]

---

4 Eadmer of Canterbury, *The Life of St. Anselm: Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and tr. R.W. Southern, pp. 29–30.

5 Rule, Martin, *The Life and Times of St. Anselm: Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Britains*, vol I, p. 197. It is not clear from which sources Rule has gleaned this description, although the sentence he quotes about Anselm's 'inmost soul' is from Eadmer's biography.

Eadmer then writes that "Thinking therefore that others also would be glad to know what he had found, he immediately and ungrudgingly wrote it on writing tablets and gave them to one of his brethren for safe-keeping".[6]

Anselm would have been acutely aware that expressing unconventional thoughts about God could be dangerous. A few years before his own monastery had become involved in a fierce controversy over the interpretation of the Eucharist. Berengar, a canon at the cathedral in Tours and head of the cathedral school, had been excommunicated and imprisoned for advocating an interpretation of the Eucharist which was judged to be heretical.[7] Since no-one previously had even tried to produce a deduction designed to prove that God exists, Anselm's doing so was sure to provoke opposition from those who insist that faith could not depend on reason.

And indeed it did; his project provoked violent opposition under his own roof. His own monastery harboured someone who was so opposed to what Anselm was attempting to do that he resorted to violence. The general practice amongst the monks was to write the first draft of any document on wax tablets before the final version was copied onto parchment. Eadmer tells how Anselm, having committed a draft of Chapters II, III, and IV to wax tablets,

> ... handed them to one of the community with instructions to take strict care of them. After some days he called for them, but they were not to be found; whereupon, on fresh tablets, he wrote out a second sketch, and entrusted the precious charge to the same guardian as before, but with special directions for more careful custody. The zealous and appreciative brother stowed them away in as safe a part might be of his bed; a monk's bed was a sacred receptacle, to which only the Prior and himself had access. But what was his dismay on finding them next day scattered about the floor of the dormitory, and their coating of wax dispersed in innumerable fragments all over the room! He picked up the broken framework, collected the bits of wax, and carried the forlorn wreck to Anselm, who put them together as an antiquary might the debris of a shattered epigraph in the catacombs, and succeeded, though barely succeeded, in reintegrating their legend. It was now high time to take more jealous precaution, for a little carelessness might doom his few sentences

6 Eadmer, *Life of St. Anselm*, tr. Southern, p. 30. Richard Southern notes that the use of wax tablets for first drafts and rough notes was universal at this time and very many examples can be quoted of their use in monasteries. The tablets were in the form of a diptych folded to protect the wax face and were worn in the girdle at the right-hand side attached to a cord.

7 For a thorough discussion of the controversy generated by Berengar's views, see Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, chapters 4–7.

> to oblivion, and in the name of the Lord, he ordered them to be transferred to parchment.

How accurate is Eadmer's adulatory description of Anselm's life is a matter of scholarly debate. Even so, it appears that Anselm's project met fierce resistance from the very start. It was only several years later, and at the behest of the Archbishop of Lyon, that Anselm agreed to put his name on the 'little work' and authorized its circulation.

Soon after the *Proslogion* was published, it elicited a critical commentary, called *What Someone Might Respond on Behalf of the Fool*. It is uncertain who its author was, although the tradition of interpretation has it that the author was an otherwise unknown monk from Marmoutiers, named Gaunilo. Ian Logan has reported that:

> Of the extant early manuscripts, only one mentions Gaunilo as the author of the *Pro Insipiente*, … but as there is no separate manuscript tradition for the *Pro Insipiente* to that originating with Anselm at Bec (not even in Marmoutiers), it is possible that this ascription is the result of a scribal fancy.[8]

Since I shall be discussing passages in this commentary from time to time, and Anselm's response to them, for convenience I also will refer to its author by that name. Soon after that critique appeared, Anselm quickly wrote a *Reply*, in which he responds with rebuttals of Gaunilo's criticisms, and restates his proofs in ways strikingly different from those he presented in the *Proslogion*.

2 Anselm's Quest

It is often remarked that commentary on Anselm's *Proslogion* is sharply divided between those who insist on, or exemplify, a purely philosophical or philosophical-theological approach to the interpretation of *Proslogion*'s theses, and those who highlight the meditative, religious aspect of *Proslogion*: focussing on the roles of revelation, sacred tradition, the primacy of faith, and

8 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 116. Bernd Goebel has suggested in an email he wrote me that the author might be a friend of Anselm's named Ralph, the abbot of the monastery at Battle in England.

the mystical-contemplative life of Anselm the monk.[9] Some try to explain, with varying degrees of success, how both aspects co-exist in the *Proslogion*.

Anselm begins the *Proslogion* with a long prayer to which he gave the heading, "*An arousing up of the mind to the contemplation of God*". This prayer is the longest of the 26 chapters which constitute the *Proslogion*. Little attention is paid to this opening prayer by those commentators who refer to the *Proslogion* only to debate whether or not 'the ontological argument' attributed to him is cogent or fallacious. Yet it cannot be over-emphasized that Anselm is a monk who, at the time of writing the *Proslogion* was about to become the abbot of the monastery of Bec in Normandy, France. Defying his parents' wishes, he had devoted his life to God, roaming Europe to find a monastery where he could study under a distinguished scholar and commit himself to a life of contemplation as a monk. He joined the monastery of Bec at the age of 27 to work under the mentorship of Lanfranc.

I confess that I too have not taken seriously enough that Anselm was not only the author of a famous – or infamous – proof of the existence of God, but also was engaged in a spiritual quest as he beseeches God to grant him a direct experience of His very self. In *From Belief to Understanding*, the first book I published in 1976 on Anselm's proof of the existence of God, I hardly mentioned the latter, and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, published in 2018, I devoted only one page to commenting on this opening prayer.

That that was a serious deficiency has been brought home to me by my belated reading of Gregory Schufreider's *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, published in 1994, but yet to be accorded the recognition it deserves. For Schufreider has written an insightful and sensitive exposition of Anselm's *Monologion* and *Proslogion* by stressing the importance for Anselm's thought of the monastic environment in which Anselm was thinking. He portrays Anselm as standing at the threshold of that historic point in medieval thought just before the bulk of the works of Aristotle again became available in the West, during the so-called twelfth-century renaissance, and began to be taught in schoolrooms. He writes:

> Consequently, those of us now coming to a reading of Anselm's writings will find ourselves historically unprepared for them, even as most of us

9 As has been pointed out by Rostislav Tkachenko in an unpublished translation of his article *Naukovi zapysky Ukrayins'koho katolyc'koho universytetu* ('*Proslogion* of Anselm of Canterbury as a Story and an Explanation of the Way(s) to Know God: An Examination of a Classical Medieval Text in Dialogue with Its Modern Interpreters'), VIII:3 (2016), 265–282.) written in Ukrainian.

> come to his thought from out of our own scholastic, rather than monastic, training.[10]

Schufreider emphasizes the differences between the nature of the thought which issues out of the practices of the schoolroom – in which our own way of thinking has been formed – and the practices of spirituality acquired through monastic training. He comments:

> Certainly the style of the scholastics – the stiflingly strict, objective formality of the *quaestio* format, as a method of question and answer befitting a public presentation – suits classroom discussions at the university as surely as Anselm's early writings – written in a unique genre of prayerfully introspective, rational meditation – fits the form of monastic life he practiced daily. Giving evidence in its very style of his commitment to the intimately private occupation of spiritual elevation.[11]

That is why I now recognize that, if we are to understand the nature of Anselm's quest, we need to do to more than just read his opening prayer. We need also to feel along with him as he expresses the torment of his yearning to see and experience God while being acutely aware of the limitations of own inadequate understanding. For that spiritual quest provides both the context and the motivation of his composing his proof of the existence of God.

I now recognize how important it is to take seriously the fact that the *Proslogion* is largely an extended prayer addressed to God, written mostly in first-to-second-person discourse, unlike the *Monologion*. This is much more than a difference of style. Presenting his thinking in this way enabled him to embed his reasoning within the deeper context of his search for a direct experience of God, so that his writing is at one and the same time a rational articulation of his argument for the existence and nature of God and an expression of his spiritual craving to know God so directly that he may love Him and rejoice in Him.

One significant consequence is that by addressing his reasoning *to* the God whom he was seeking enabled him to prove that God exists much earlier, and much more succinctly, than he was able to do in the dense third-person prose of the *Monologion*. The exposition which follows has benefitted from my reading Schufreider's location of Anselm's writings as standing "at that juncture in

10 Gregory Schufreider *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings*, p. 2.
11 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 2.

the history of Western thought when the nature of reason is itself in transition from a monastic to a scholastic view of rationality".[12]

In the opening lines of the *Proslogion* Anselm lists what Schufreider calls "a litany of imperatives" addressed to himself:

> *Come now, little man,*
> *flee your preoccupations for a short while;*
> *briefly put out of sight your turbulent thoughts;*
> *discard your burdensome cares; and*
> *postpone your painstaking distractions.*
> *Empty yourself a little while for God; and*
> *rest a little while in Him.*
> *Enter the inner cubicle of your mind;*
> *exclude everything apart from God and what can assist you in seeking Him and close the door to search for Him.*
> *Speak now, my heart;*
> *Say now to God:*
> *I seek Your face,*
> *For Your face, Lord, I am searching.*[13]

In the last two lines Anselm is quoting Psalm 27:8. Any monk would know that this is the prescription for the practice of meditation, which Anselm is steeling himself in very strong terms to enact. After that burst of self-instruction, Anselm submits his first request:

> *So come now, Lord my God, teach my heart*
> *where and how it should seek You,*
> *where and how it should find You.*
> *Lord, if You are not here,*
> *where should I seek You who are absent?*
> *And if You are everywhere,*
> *why do I not see You who are present?*
> *But surely, You dwell in accessible light!*

12 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 6.

13 Cf. Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 103. I have laid out these prayers in the same poetic form as Schufreider does. It expresses well how Anselm has modelled his prayer on the style of the Psalms, where thoughts in one line are often repeated by similar words in the next. Schufreider notes that this poetic rendering of the prayers is suggested by Schmitt's version of the Latin text, and further interpolated by Benedicta Ward in her English translation. The translations are my own, guided by Ian Logan's translation.

and where is the inaccessible light,
and how shall I approach the unapproachable light?
Or rather, who will lead me and bring me to it,
so that I may see You in it?

Anselm's yearning to *see* God with the eye of his mind, is the dominant theme of this prayer. He returns to describe God as dwelling "in inaccessible light" in *Proslogion* XVI, where he repeats the sentiments expressed here. He feels alienated from the God to whom he has committed his life. Schufreider comments that the plea that the mind's vision be elevated from out of its state of loss, that it be repaired and reformed, constitutes the other side of this prayer.

What so distresses Anselm is that it seems that God is absent, yet he knows that God is supposed to be everywhere. But if so, why does he not see Him? It is not that God dwells in darkness; Anselm bemoans the fact that it is we who are shrouded in darkness. Rather, God dwells in light so bright that we cannot look at it directly. As Schufreider comments:

> Of course, this image of the *lux inaccessible* is standard fare in mystical theology. It is cited from Paul's letter to Timothy, to whom Pseudo-Dionysius addressed his negative theology, while the image of the hidden God, who has turned his face away from us, is an essential image of the original psalms.[14]

Thereafter, Anselm's prayer is an anguished and heart-felt plea for illumination, as he laments that, despite his commitment to God, he has never found God:

Lord, You are my God
and You are my Lord,
and I have never seen You.
You made me and remade me.
You conferred all my goods upon me,
and still I have not known You.
In short, I was made to see You,
and I have not seen that for which I was made.

Anselm yearns to come to know the God to whom he is praying, repeatedly asking, "*When will You enlighten our eyes, and show us Your face*?" Praying for

14 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 105. Anselm writes "*lux inaccessiblis*", not "*lux inaccessibile*".

enlightenment, Anselm brings *Proslogion* 1 to its close with a forceful disavowal, matched by an affirmation of the direction his quest must take:

> *I do not attempt, Lord, to penetrate Your loftiness,*
> *for in no way do I compare my understanding to it,*
> *but I do desire to understand to some extent Your truth,*
> *which my heart believes and loves.*
> *And indeed, I do not seek to understand, so that I might believe,*
> *but I believe so that I might understand.*
> *For I also believe this:*
> *that unless I believe,*
> *I shall not understand.*

That could not be clearer. Anselm is signalling, as openly and as transparently as he can, that his proof will begin with a declaration of faith, and will achieve the understanding he seeks by deducing it from his beliefs. He is *not* writing the *Proslogion* in order to convert disbelievers and unbelievers to his own faith. His quest is both more intensely personal and yet more modest; he is seeking at least some understanding of what he already believes. Yet he begins his quest with an open mind. For in *Proslogion* 11, he confronts fairly and squarely the most radical challenge possible to his belief: the claim that there is no god.[15]

3 Faith Seeking Understanding

Anselm begins *Proslogion* 11 by asking God to grant him two petitions which are more specific than the quite generalized requests in *Proslogion* 1. He writes:

> *Therefore, Lord, You who grant understanding to faith, grant that I may understand, at least to the extent that You think it suitable, that You are* [or: exist] *as we believe, and that You are what we believe.*

By introducing *Proslogion* 11 with the word "*Therefore*", Anselm is indicating that what follows logically from what he had just written. In the earliest manuscripts those chapter headings appear as a list between the Preface and the

15 I have quoted only some segments of this prayer; it is too long to quote in full. I refer my readers to Schufreider's insightful commentary on it in the first section of Part Three of his *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, pp. 97ff.

main text, like a table of contents, not as divisions between the chapters. The practice of modern translators of inserting the heading of each section at the beginning of that section disrupts the continuity of Anselm's text. The passage quoted would have appeared to be continuous with the passage quoted from the end of *Proslogion* I.

Since Anselm has acknowledged that his own understanding is not comparable to God's loftiness, he is beseeching God to grant him the gift of understanding. For not only does he believe so that he might understand, but he also believes he will not understand unless he believes. Yet he cannot attain understanding of his beliefs on his own. He needs God to illuminate his mind so that he can overcome his confusions and uncertainties. For he has already beseeched God:

> *Permit me to look up to Your light,*
> *either from afar,*
> *or from the depths*
> *Teach me to seek You*
> *and show Yourself to the one who seeks,*
> *for neither can I seek You unless You lead the way,*
> *nor find You unless You show Yourself.*

If Anselm is to find God, God must show Himself to him.

Thus, both his initial beliefs and his new-found understanding are *gifts* from God. He does not regard the new understanding he has attained as an achievement he has won through his own cleverness. He needed God to illuminate his mind, for otherwise he would not understand. All that is in keeping with what he was praying in *Proslogion* I.

Because we today are inheritors of the so-called Enlightenment, if we have read *Proslogion* I at all, we cannot help but be struck by the sudden change of style as we begin reading *Proslogion* II. Whereas the former was personal, emotional, and the outpourings of someone who is distressed by his own faith, the latter rapidly shifts into the impersonal rigour of a deduction articulated with all the certainty of logical truth. Many readers interpret what follows in *Proslogion* II as if Anselm has shelved his faith and turned to logic as the way to gain understanding. Indeed, that *must* be how it looks to all those who read him as presenting a version of 'the ontological argument'. I pointed out in §1.1 that it was unprecedented for Anselm to produce a strictly deductive argument to prove that the God to whom he has just been praying exists. Yet to appraise *Proslogion* II as a cut-and-dried exercise in logic is to misunderstand several important issues.

The first issue concerns Anselm's motivation for producing his proof. I submit that Anselm launches this unprecedented kind of a proof to ensure that the search he is about to undertake to find the God in whom he believes is based on a solid foundation. The emotional honesty evident in his prayer is matched by his intellectual honesty in confronting the most radical challenge possible to his very existence as a monk: the fact that someone has denied that there is a god. Until he has established that the God to whom he has been praying truly exists there is no point in proceeding any further. This proof is integral to his quest.

A second issue is whether Anselm has set aside his faith and turned to logic as the way to gain understanding. When the argument in *Proslogion* II is interpreted as a version of 'the ontological argument' it certainly seems that that is so. But it is factually incorrect to read him as having shelved his beliefs. For he writes immediately after the opening sentence of *Proslogion* II that:

> (B) *And indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

That this sentence contains the word "You" shows that Anselm is continuing to address the God in whom he believes.

Introducing this sentence with the words "*And indeed*" ties it to the preceding sentence. The sentence (B) is a *specification* of the petition: "*Give me … to understand … that You are what we believe*". Anselm has stated this belief as something for which he needs God's help to understand. We will see in the following section that when Anselm declares that belief he is *not* asserting, as a premise, that God is something than which nothing greater can be thought. Rather, it will be seen in §1.5 that his argument begins not with that whole proposition, but with his extracting the phrase "Something than which nothing greater could be thought" from that belief and modifying it somewhat.[16] And we will see in Chapter 8 that when he comes to the point of deducing that God exists, the premise from which he validly infers that conclusion is also one of his most basic beliefs.

I submit that the reason why Anselm has chosen to present a strictly deductive proof of the existence of God in the middle of a heartfelt prayer is because

16 Simply as an aid to my readers, hereafter I shall throughout this book hyphenate the indefinite description "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought", and its variants, whenever that phrase is being used to refer to an entity, but I will not hyphenate that phrase whenever it is being used as part of a predicate, as in "… is something than which a greater cannot be thought".

there is more to logic than the symbolic calculus which has informed analytical philosophy for the past one hundred years. Anselm has prayed, "*I do desire to understand to some extent Your truth, which my heart believes and loves*". The point of having rules of inference is to ensure the preservation of truth. The test for the validity of an inference is whether it is *possible* that the premise or premises be true, but the purported conclusion be false. So, if he begins with a premise which is undeniably true, and if the only additional premises are also true, and he invokes only logical and conceptual truths in the course of his deduction, then he is entitled to be confident that his conclusions are true.

This is entirely consistent with the passionate yearning expressed in *Proslogion* 1. Anselm desperately wants to find God; he wants God not to turn His face away from him; he wants to 'see' God. Of course, when he repeatedly says that he wants to 'see' God, he is not saying that he wants God to appear as a body in front of his eyes; after all, he believes that God does not have a body, so He could not be literally seen. Instead, he longs to see God with what Plato bequeathed to all subsequent philosophers: the eye of the soul. Hence his desire to understand the truth of God.

To understand requires insight. In his famous analogy of the divided line which Plato wrote in the *Republic*, he distinguished four different levels of cognitive engagement which "participate in clarity to the same degree as their objects participate in truth": image-making (*eikasia*); conviction (*pistis*); reasoning (*dianoia*) and insight (*noesis*).[17] Insight is what yields the highest form of knowledge, whereas reasoning requires completion by insight if genuine knowledge is to be gained.

A characteristic of seeing is that it presupposes that the act of looking has been successful and completed. Aristotle was the first to notice this characteristic, writing: "one has seen and at the same time is seeing the same thing, and is contemplating and has contemplated the same thing".[18] As Aristotle commented, that is unlike the action of building a house, because one cannot say "I have built a house" until the house is complete. While looking at something takes a little time, the process of looking has been performed successfully at every moment while its object is being seen. The metaphorical use of seeing shares that sense of completeness. When the process of reasoning reaches its conclusion, that process is complete. The mind which has been moving through the argument step by step can now be still, and contemplate the truth of the conclusion reached, because understanding has now been attained.

17 Plato, *Republic*, Book 6, 511c.
18 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 32.

Attaining the clarity of understanding has an affective character which uplifts the mind. That metaphor is as intelligible today as it was in ancient Greece and medieval France. Who has not found themselves in some puzzling situation, or engaged in a conversation where the participants seem to be at cross purposes? Once the source of puzzlement or confusion is explained, it is natural to say, "Ah! I see that; now I understand".

Reasoning reaches its proper consummation when it leads a thinker to an act of insight. The simplest exercises in reasoning are those inferences of the form: "*p*"; "If *p* then *q*"; therefore "*q*". Yet one has to *see* that the conclusion "*q*" follows from those two premises. If someone who has accepted "*p*" and "If *p* then *q*" obstinately keeps refusing to accept "*q*", there is little that one can do than to present other examples of the same form, or a relevant truth table, and say, "Can't you see that that is valid?"

So, Anselm has not abandoned his quest when he introduces his proof; on the contrary, it is the means by which he is seeking to find God. At the end of *Proslogion* IV – after he has proven that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, and that He so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist – he gives thanks to God:

> *Because what I first believed by Your gift, I now understand by Your illumination such that if I should not want to believe it, I would not be able not to understand that You exist.*

He is no longer able not to understand that God exists because he has *seen* from his reasoning how that conclusion has been established.

4 The Standard Misinterpretation of How Anselm Proves that God Exists

Much of the discussion of this proof amongst philosophers pays no attention to the context in which Anselm embeds it. It is little wonder, then, that the commentaries and debates reveal an elementary misunderstanding of what his proof is, and where it is located. Yet, when the character of the *Proslogion* as a whole is taken seriously, it becomes clear that for 943 years, and to this day, his overall argumentative strategy has been either ignored or misunderstood, and his proof of God's existence fundamentally misinterpreted. For this argument is no clever intellectual exercise, nor a proof in the sense in which theorems in Euclidian geometry are proven.

It was noted above that immediately after Anselm beseeches God to grant that he might understand "*that You are* [or: exist] *as we believe, and that You are what we believe*", he then specifies what those he calls "*we*" believe:

> (B) *And indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

By situating this declaration of belief in the context of prayer, Anselm has unambiguously indicated that that belief is far too problematic to serve as the basis for his proof, since he does not understand whether it is true. Here, as he prepares to launch his proof, it is quite indeterminate whether that belief is true, or not. He *does not yet* understand that God is something than which nothing greater could be thought. At this preliminary stage, he claims nothing more than that it is merely what 'we believe' God to be. Whether God is of such a nature is precisely what he wants to understand.

It is this sentence (B) which is standardly misinterpreted as introducing the premise of Anselm's proof. To cite just one example from the plethora of commentators who interpret this argument in the same way, in his much-quoted translation and commentary of the *Proslogion*, Max Charlesworth writes:

> Can we show by rational means that what we believe by faith can be understood? That is to say, can we show by rational means that God, *defined* as "something than which nothing greater can be thought", really exists?[19]

Some modern commentators who also take that belief to be the first premise of his proof betray an awareness that the way Charlesworth has posed the question cannot be quite right. While the description he quotes is usually said to be a 'definition' of the nature of God, some express discomfort with saying so. Brian Davies, for example, says that it is "something like a definition",[20] and Kenneth Himma says that it is "a conceptual truth (or, so to speak, true by definition)".[21]

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19 Max Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 54–55. My emphasis.

20 Brian Davies, 'Anselm and the Ontological Argument' in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, pp. 157–78, at p. 168.

21 Himma, Kenneth, 'Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence', http://www.iep.utm.edu/ont-arg/ (accessed 18 August 2017).

But it is not possible that the belief in the sentence (B) could be anything like a definition. Nor could it be the first premise of his proof. It will be seen that in the middle of *Proslogion* III, after proving that "*Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist*", Anselm declares:

> *And this is You, Lord our God.*

If Anselm's first premise is the belief expressed in the sentence (B), his proof of the existence of God would have the trivial form "*p*, therefore, *p*". That is absurd. Not only is it the case that that belief cannot be a definition, but it also cannot even be the first premise of his proof.

Rather than being a premise, when Anselm declares the belief in (B), he is asserting 'a doubtful matter' (to quote Cicero) which he setting out to prove. Beginning a proof by announcing the conclusion to be proven before even mentioning the premise(s) from which that conclusion can be deduced is characteristic of Anselm's argumentative style. Nor is that practice peculiar to him; many authors do the same. Indeed, as a schoolboy I was taught to lay out the proofs of geometrical theorems in that format.

That Anselm is beginning his proof with a definition has become entrenched in the minds of commentators because they wrongly assume that that interpretation has the authority of Thomas Aquinas behind it. Before presenting his Five Ways, Aquinas discussed the question whether the existence of God is self-evident, which had become a live issue in the 13th Century. One of the arguments he considered proposed that as soon as the signification of the word "God" is understood, it is at once seen that God exists, for this word signifies that than which nothing greater can be thought. Aquinas rejected this argument on the grounds that:

> Granting … that someone should think of God in this way, namely as "that being a greater than which cannot be conceived", it does not follow on this account that the person must understand what is signified to exist in the world of fact, but only in the mind. Nor can one argue that it exists in fact unless one grants that there actually exists in fact something a greater than which cannot be conceived. It is, however, precisely this assertion the atheist denies.[22]

22 Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*: 1a, 2, 1, ad 2, tr. David Burr.

Despite the occurrence of the description "that being a greater than which cannot be conceived" in both the exposition of this argument and Aquinas' objection to it, the argument which Aquinas is addressing is not Anselm's. It is a quite different argument presented by one of Thomas's contemporaries: Bonaventure. Bonaventure had appropriated Anselm's conclusion that "*This* [i.e., Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *is You, Lord our God*" and treated it as a premise to argue that the existence of God is self-evident. It is Bonaventure's misappropriation of Anselm's conclusion which is relevant to the question which Aquinas is addressing, not the argument Anselm actually presented in the *Proslogion*. But almost everyone ever since has mistakenly assumed that Aquinas was rejecting *Anselm's* argument on the false grounds that it begins with a definition.

There are a number of reasons why Anselm is not asserting the belief expressed in (B) as a definition. The first is that, as we have just seen, Anselm has disavowed any attempt to penetrate God's loftiness, for in no way does he compare his understanding to it. So how could he, just four sentences later, be introducing a definition of God? If Anselm is not even *attempting* to penetrate the loftiness of God, he is in no position at the beginning of his proof to offer such a definition, nor indeed any conceptual truths which describe what God is. In fact, he has just asked God, in the previous sentence, to grant "*that I may understand, at least to the extent that You think it suitable, that … You are what we believe*". As will be seen later, since Anselm argues in *Proslogion* XV that God is greater than can be thought, it is not possible that *anyone* could define the nature of God.

The second reason is that when Anselm declares that belief, he is *anticipating* a conclusion which he is about to prove. Since he proves that that belief in true in the latter half of *Proslogion* III, if it were a premise, his actual proof, as I pointed out above, would have the absurdly trivial form of "*p*", therefore, "*p*"! That belief is needed to be a definition *if, but only if* it were a premise of 'the ontological argument' because 'the ontological' argument is supposed to be a proof of the existence of God which is purely *a priori*.

The third reason why Anselm could not be asserting that initial belief as a definition of God is because it is not in a form which could ever serve as a definition. It certainly is not in the form of a definition in the classical Aristotelian sense. The medieval scholars, including Anselm, had learnt from Aristotle, via Boethius, that definitions require identifying a *species* as a member of a *genus*, differentiated from other species of that same genus by some distinctive feature. For any medieval thinker, any definition must comply with that prescription. Since God could not be a member of some more extensive *genus*,

differentiated by some distinctive feature from other members of that same *genus*, it is not possible to define the nature of God in the classical way.

It might be countered that definitions can be cogent even if they do not conform to Aristotle's prescription. That is a reasonable point; in the modern era, that Aristotelian prescription is perceived to be much too narrow. For example, Peano's axiomatization of arithmetic is based on a recursive definition of what it is to be a 'natural number'. However, no matter how far the requirements which any definition must meet may be relaxed, definitions must be precise, whatever their form. That simple requirement is all it takes to debar Anselm's belief from being a definition. The belief in (B) could not be 'true by definition' for "*something than which nothing greater could be thought*" is an *indefinite* description, and nothing can be *defined* in terms which are *indefinite*.

A fourth reason is that that indefinite description involves *relations* in two different ways. The comparative term "greater" involves a relation between two different things, or two different circumstances. And it also describes 'something' in terms of its relation to thinking. Anselm argues in *Monologion* XV that while relative expressions can quite properly be used to refer to things, they do not signify the *substance* of the thing to which they refer. From that he infers that if some relational expression is predicated of the Supreme Nature, it does not signify its substance, that is, what kind of thing it is. As he put the point in his dialogue *De Grammatico*, they do not describe what something is '*per se*'. Since Anselm's descriptive phrase is doubly relational, while it can be used properly to *refer* to God, it is quite unsuitable to serve as a definition. For him, a definition has to describe the essential features – the substance – of what is being defined, and relational predicates do not do that. This a quite different point from the one about *genera* and *species*.

After writing the sentence (B) Anselm abruptly stops praying because, like most people who try to pray for any length of time, he has been distracted by an extraneous thought. He remembers that in the Psalms which the monks chant in chapel every day there is twice mentioned a fool who has said in his heart:

> There is not a god [*non est deus*].[23]

Anselm is describing a real-life situation. The way of life of a monk, to which he has devoted himself against the wishes of his parents, is challenged by the Fool's denial. For he recognizes that if the Fool is right, his very existence as a monk, and his role as prior, and about be become abbot, of the monastery, would be meaningless, for it would be based on a fiction. The proof he devises

23 The verse occurs in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1. (These two Psalms are doublets.)

in response to the Fool's challenge is no mere intellectual exercise. It is an existential necessity, an intensely personal quest for understanding driven by his yearning to experience God, rendered all the more acute by the Fool's denial.

But how to proceed? He cannot resume his prayer until he has confronted and dealt with this profoundly troubling challenge. It would be silly to ask God, "Do You exist?" because that question already presupposes that the answer is "Yes". That is not a genuine question. For the same reason, it would be silly to ask, "Are You something than which nothing greater could be thought?". So, he must transform that question into one he can sensibly ask. It follows from his belief that only God is something than which nothing greater could be thought, and the Fool's belief that there is not a god, that there is not *anything* than which nothing greater could not be thought. So Anselm transforms the question he cannot ask into one which he can sensibly ask: "*Is there not* anything *of such a nature?*".

The task of *Proslogion* II is to answer that question. To do so he infers from his question that "That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality" and proceeds to argue that that supposition could not be true. By the end of *Proslogion* II he has an answer:

> *There exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought, both in the understanding and in reality.*

The standard interpretation, however, fails to understand that that is the proper conclusion of *Proslogion* II. Instead, all those who unthinkingly accept the standard misinterpretation *read in* a conclusion which is not in *Proslogion* II. They infer from Anselm's actual conclusion and a proposition which they extract from the sentence (B), that what Anselm meant to conclude – but for some obscure reason did not – is that: "God is in reality".

However, after Anselm remembers the Fool's denial, neither the pronoun "*tu*" [You], nor the noun "*deus*" [God], is mentioned anywhere until the middle of *Proslogion* III. Neither of those words plays any role whatsoever in the deduction of Anselm's actual conclusion in *Proslogion* II. I am dumbfounded that so many commentators allege that the conclusion of *Proslogion* II is that "God is in reality". For they seem not to have asked themselves the obvious question: "How could Anselm have intended to deduce such a momentous conclusion, but from some reason did not write it?"

So, neither the premise, nor the conclusion of what is alleged to be 'Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God' is legitimate. One of the very few commentators who has grasped this elementary point is David Smith, who exclaims:

> It is *astonishing* how many presentations of Anselm's traditional Ontological Argument suppose that the argument gets under way with Anselm defining God as something than which no greater can be conceived.[24]

Smith is right to be astonished. A belief which Anselm does not yet understand is far too weak a peg upon which to hang a proof for a conclusion so vital as the existence of God. Yet almost everyone who comments on this proof takes for granted that this uncertain declaration of belief is meant to be a 'definition' of – or a 'conceptual truth' about – God.

So, although it is standardly alleged that Anselm is presenting the belief he declares by writing the sentence (B) as the premise of his argument, that belief is nothing of the sort. It is neither a premise, nor is it in a form to be acceptable as a definition. It is exactly what Anselm states it to be: a declaration of what "we believe". As Geo Siegwart has written to me: "This is the insight from which no interpretation may deviate that wants to be taken seriously."[25]

5 The Invalidity of the Standard Misinterpretation of Anselm's Proof

Furthermore, the argument thus attributed to Anselm is *manifestly invalid*. The basic argument underlying the traditional and standard misinterpretation of Anselm's argument has the following form:

(a) *x* is something *F*;
(b) Something *F* is *G*;
(c) Therefore, *x* is *G*.

It is a simple matter of logic that *any* argument of that form is fallacious – unless it has already been established that only one thing is *F*. Consider the following counter-example:

(a*) Donald Trump is someone who was elected President of the USA;
(b*) Someone who was elected President of the USA has an African father;
(c*) Therefore, Donald Trump is someone who has an African father.

24 A.D. Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 12.
25 Personal email, 23 April 2020.

The two premises are true, but the conclusion is false. Citing a counter-example of the same form which is manifestly invalid is the standard way logicians demonstrate the invalidity of arguments. *Any argument of that form* is invalid, whether or not it mentions existence. Therefore, the argument standardly attributed to Anselm is demonstrably invalid.

The reason why it could be shown so easily that this argument is invalid is because it contains an *indefinite* description as its middle term. In the absence of some extra consideration which would establish that that description is true of only one thing, any indefinite description leaves open the possibility that it is true of more than one thing. But there is nothing in *Proslogion* II to indicate that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unique. Anselm does not rule out the possibility that there is more than one such being until the second half of *Proslogion* III.

One commentator who has presented Anselm's argument in a way which is somewhat more faithful to the text is John Marenbon. He provides a reasonably accurate summary of the argument in *Proslogion* II, and then says that "Anselm's train of reasoning seems to be the following".[26]

(i) God is something than which nothing greater can be thought. [Premise]
(ii) If someone understands an expression, "*a*", then *a* exists (*est*) in his intellect. [Premise]
(iii) The Fool understands "something than which nothing greater can be thought". [Premise]
(iv) Something than which nothing greater can be thought exists in the Fool's intellect. [From (ii), (iii)]
(v) Something than which nothing greater can be thought does not exist in reality. [Premise for *reductio*]
(vi) An implicit premise, asserting in some way that existence in reality is a great-making property.
(vii) If that than which nothing greater can be thought exists in the intellect and not in reality, then something can be thought greater than it, namely, that than which nothing greater can be thought existing in reality also. [From (vi)]
(viii) Something can be thought that is greater than that than which nothing greater can be thought. [From (iv), (v), (vii)]

26 Marenbon, John, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', in *Central Works of Philosophy I: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. John Shand, pp. 169–93, at p. 175. I will use Marenbon's translation of "*intellectus*" as "intellect" in my discussion of his reconstruction.

(ix) That than which nothing greater can be thought is that than which something greater can be thought. [From (viii)]
(x) It is not the case that something than which nothing greater can be thought does not exist in reality. [Negation of (v), by indirect proof]
(xi) God exists in reality. [From (i), (x)]

As this reconstruction makes clear, Marenbon is another of those commentators who have adopted the standard interpretation of Anselm's argument, wrongly assuming that its first premise is (i), and trying to justify its conclusion as (xi), even though no such sentence is in Anselm's text. I do not have to repeat just how wrong it is to present (i) as the premise of this argument. However, in other respects Marenbon's reconstruction is more faithful to Anselm's text than Himma's. Indeed, it is a more faithful presentation than most.

In Marenbon's reconstruction, (xi) is deduced from (i) and (x). That particular inference is valid, because (x) is equivalent to the universal proposition:

(x*) Anything than which nothing greater can be thought exists in reality.

By construing the argument in this way, Marenbon has very cleverly overcome the invalidity of concluding that God exists in reality by deducing it from (i) and the conclusion which Anselm actually wrote:

> *There exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, both in the intellect and in reality.*

Since that inference is demonstrably invalid, Marenbon's deducing (x) from (i) and (x*) is quite a novel and more plausible variation on the standard interpretation. But the validity of that final inference is bought at the cost of invalidities earlier in his reconstruction.

Marenbon is being faithful to the text of *Proslogion* II when he introduces "*That*-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought" in (vii), although introducing that assumption on the basis of (iv) is invalid. The Fool need not have any particular instance of *something*-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought in his intellect.[27]

It seems that in (vii) Marenbon is introducing the assumption, "That-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the intellect and not in reality",

27 I shall explain why it is not valid to assume that "That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the intellect" on the basis that it exists in the *Fool's* intellect in §1.6.1.

by invoking that singular term as an exemplar of *something*-than-which-nothing greater-can-be-thought. That is legitimate, but he has conjoined two different assumptions: one as a representative of (iv) and another as a representative of (v). Doing that is what generates the invalidities which ensue.[28]

When Marenbon infers (x) as the negation of (v), based on the impossibility of (ix), that inference is fallacious. (x) does not follow validly from the self-contradictory proposition (ix). (x) is equivalent to the universal proposition (x*) which is not entailed by the impossibility of (ix). What follows validly from the self-contradictory proposition (ix) is that the antecedent of (vii) is impossible. That is, what validly follows is the singular proposition:

> It is not possible that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the intellect but not in reality.

Furthermore, that consequence is still dependent upon the other assumption: that "*That*-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the intellect". That second assumption must be discharged before any conclusion may validly be drawn. It is clear from the text of *Proslogion* II that Anselm understands that this roundabout procedure is required if he is validly to infer any conclusion from (ix). That is why he generalizes that singular term, and infers that "*Something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the intellect and in reality". Since that proposition does not mention the singular term, "*that*-than-which-…", it may validly be reaffirmed as entailed no longer by that second assumption, but by the proposition with an indefinite description as its subject, that "Something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the intellect".

That is exactly what Anselm does. But once that second assumption is discharged, (x) cannot be validly inferred. What validly follows is the conclusion which Anselm actually wrote in *Proslogion* II – that "*Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the intellect and in reality*". All Marenbon has done is to shift the inevitable invalidity generated by trying to infer (xi) from (i) to a different step in the argument!

Demonstrating the invalidity of Marenbon's novel reconstruction strengthens the case against the standard interpretation. The argument regularly attributed to Anselm as his 'ontological argument' is nothing but an invalid caricature.

I am aware that some readers might find this demonstration of the invalidity of Marenbon's reconstruction as just an exercise in technical nit-picking.

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28 I will demonstrate in §3.5 how Anselm's introduction of the singular term, "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" can be justified.

But questions of validity cannot be avoided when the cogency of an argument is being assessed. The complicated procedure just described is the only valid way of deducing conclusions from a premise with an indefinite description as its subject. What I find so impressive is that the argument which Anselm presents in *Proslogion* II shows that he was intuitively aware that he must follow that procedure, centuries before the rules of 'Natural Deduction' were explicitly formulated in 1934 by Gerhard Gentzen.

6 The Three-Stage Structure of Anselm's Proof

When I first read the text of the *Proslogion*, I saw that since the conclusion of *Proslogion* II does not mention God, I must read on into *Proslogion* III to see where he draws his conclusions about God. Provided one attends to what Anselm actually wrote – rather than reading in conclusions which are not there – it is obvious that his proof consists of three distinct, but logically connected, stages which progressively build up to his conclusions. That discovery is what I presented in *From Belief to Understanding*, published in 1976.

I call discerning this three-stage structure a 'discovery' because that is what I discovered as I read the text. But I do not claim to be the first to discern that structure. In a review published in 1967 of the commentaries which had been written on Anselm's proof since the 1930s, Arthur McGill wrote: "The reasoning of these two chapters obviously falls into three units".[29] He identified the first unit, in *Proslogion* II, as designed to prove that "Something than which nothing greater can be conceived must exist in reality as well as in the understanding". He correctly saw that in the second unit, in the first part of *Proslogion* III, that

> [Anselm] continues to consider something "than which nothing greater can be conceived", but this time in order to prove, not that this something exists, but that it exists in such a way that it cannot be conceived by the human mind as not existing.

In the third and last unit of reasoning, in the second part of *Proslogion* III, McGill says,

> Anselm takes a different direction and tries to prove that the subject under discussion – namely, that which has been shown not only to exist

29 Arthur C. McGill, 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument' in John Hick and Arthur McGill, ed., *The Many-Faced Argument*, pp. 33–110, at p. 39.

> but also to exist in such a way that it cannot even be conceived not to exist – is actually the Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth.[30]

Putting aside a few minor quibbles about how McGill has expressed the content of those three 'units', that is the threefold structure I too discerned when I first read the text. He is right; that three-stage structure is so obvious that it has hardly ever been noticed.

In 1978 Gregory Schufreider published his *An Introduction to Anselm's Argument* in which he argued that

> What has been taken to be a separate proof for the existence of God in *Proslogion* II is no such thing, but instead is only the first stage of a single argument that spans II and III.[31]

He correctly argues that the argument in *Proslogion* III presupposes the argument in *Proslogion* II. Although his book was written independently of mine, we both saw the same overall pattern of argumentation in the text.[32]

6.1 *Stage One*

I briefly explained in §1.4 how Anselm came to ask himself: "*Is there not* [does there not exist] anything *with such a nature*?" He must first find an answer to that question *before* he can argue anything about God. To do so, he makes a second modification to that question. Having asked whether there is not anything of such a nature, he sharpens the question by inferring that no such thing is in reality. The point of this second transformation is that it narrows the question about existence to two, but only two, possibilities: something is either in reality, or it is not. Anselm has to convert "exists" into "is in reality" because, as we will see later, he has inherited from Augustine – and ultimately from Plato – a conception of existing which admits of degrees; some things exist more or less truly than other things.

To make it clear that the question he is confronting admits only two possible answers, he transposes his question into one about being in reality, because "is in reality" is a binary predicate. That transposition ensures that he is addressing a threshold question which demands a "Yes" or "No" answer.

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30 McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p. 40.

31 Gregory Schufreider, *An Introduction to Anselm's Argument*, pp. xvi–xvii.

32 Unfortunately, Schufreider creates an unnecessary difficulty for himself by translating the premise of Stage Two as: "For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist". I argue in Chapter 6 that that translation is unacceptable. That mistranslation is repeated in his *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*.

To answer that question is the task for Stage One of his proof, which he fulfils in *Proslogion* II. But before he tackles that question, he argues that even the Fool is bound to concede that "*Something-than-which-nothing-greater-can be-thought is in the understanding*". Anselm begins with establishing that because he has learnt from reading Boethius that one of the rules for 'finding arguments' – that is, finding reasons which could serve to produce belief regarding a thing in doubt – is to find a proposition with which one's opponent would have to agree. For the argumentation will only be effective if it begins from common ground.

That is why the purpose of the first half of *Proslogion* II is to establish common ground between the Fool and Anselm himself. So, Anselm paints an imaginary scenario in which the Fool has stepped out of the Psalms and is not only alive, but also he has come to the village of Bec where he overhears Anselm praying aloud in the monastery's chapel. Not only that; Anselm also assumes that the Fool understands Latin, for he writes:

> *But surely this same fool, when he hears the very thing which I have spoken of: something than which nothing greater can be thought, understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it exists.*

Since that is how Anselm begins his argument, his first premise is *not* the belief which is the content of the sentence (B), but the *fact* that he has spoken of this thing, for that is what he imagines that the Fool has heard.

This might not seem to be a distinction worth emphasizing as I have, but there is a huge difference between interpreting his first premise as the belief itself, and as the fact that he has uttered it aloud. For the latter does not assert that anything is true other than that sentence has been uttered. However, the traditional and standard interpretation takes that belief to be Anselm's first premise. We have seen that that interpretation is fraught with problems, and is unsustainable

On the other hand, if his first premise is interpreted as the fact that he has spoken of that thing, his argument begins with a simple and unproblematic truth which cannot be denied. Every reader of the *Proslogion* verifies with his or her own eyes the fact that Anselm has written the sentence (B). That is why Anselm's first premise is the *fact* that:

(1) Anselm has spoken of something than which nothing greater could be thought.

I have already reported that when Anselm writes the verb *probare* [prove] with reference to his own argument, it is always within the scope of *quod dixit* [what he has spoken of]. So, his first premise records the fact that he has said the sentence (B) aloud. Anselm then asserts that:

(2) The Fool has heard "something than which nothing greater can be thought".[33]

The two facts (1) and (2) provide the stage-setting which enables Anselm's proof to proceed. For, as I explained above, Anselm argues that even the Fool is bound to concede that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the understanding in order to establish common ground with his opponent. To establish that, he has to ensure that the Fool has at least heard that phrase and has understood what he has heard. In the passage quoted above Anselm has asserted that:

(3) When the Fool hears, 'something than which nothing greater can be thought', he understands what he hears.

From (2) and (3) it follows that:

(4) The Fool understands "something than which nothing greater can be thought".

After explaining how it is possible for something to be in the understanding irrespective of whether it exists or not, Anselm concludes the first phase of Stage One by inferring that:

> *Even the Fool is bound to concede* [convincitur] *that there is at least in the understanding something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, because he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the understanding.*

That is the argument which Anselm presents in the first half of *Proslogion* II. If his proof is to be understood, Anselm's exact words must be used to reconstruct

33 Anselm has misreported what he has said, for in (2) he has substituted "can" for "could" in (1). Perhaps he did so that he can more plausibly claim that the Fool would have to accept the inference which follows.

it. That is why it is crucial that its first premise is the *fact* that (1) is true and verifiable by any reader, rather than the belief itself. For when it is recognized that (1) is his first premise, it is possible to reconstruct a valid argument which entails the conclusion of Stage One. On the other hand, when his first premise is taken to be the *content* of his belief, there is no way that his conclusion validly follows.

In *From Belief to Understanding* I assumed that Anselm was basing the argument in the second half of Stage One on that proposition which even the Fool cannot coherently deny, as many other commentators since have also assumed.[34] But if that were how Anselm is reasoning, his argument would be invalid.[35] For it is possible that the Fool understands what he hears but all he understands is that Anselm is talking about something-or-other so described. Since he does not believe that there is a god, he quite literally has *no idea* as to whom Anselm has addressed that declaration of belief. Since the Fool need not be thinking of any particular thing so described, it is not valid to assume that he is thinking of some particular instance of which that description might be true. So, if Anselm was basing the argument in the second half of Stage One on that proposition which even the Fool cannot coherently deny, he would have no warrant for supposing that "That-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the understanding".

It seems that Anselm is aware that that would be invalid because, instead of developing his Stage One argument from the proposition which the Fool is bound to concede, he *alters his indefinite description* to presuppose that "Something-than-which-*a-greater-cannot*-be thought is in the understanding". So, in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I proposed that his second premise is:

> (2*) When Anselm says, "We believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought", he understands that he is speaking of some particular thing.

He then implicitly infers that:

> (3*) Some particular thing-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding.

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34 For example, we saw above that John Marenbon does.

35 This invalidity was pointed out by Peter Geach in his review of *From Belief to Understanding* in *Philosophy*, 52:2 (1977), pp. 234–36.

That inference is legitimate because "*nothing* greater *could* be thought" is equivalent to "*it is not possible* that *anything* greater *can* be thought", and that implies that '*a greater cannot* be thought'.

That Anselm is presupposing (3*) is evident from his beginning the second phase of this argument by asserting that:

(C) *And certainly that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be solely in the understanding*.

Anselm is entitled to introduce the singular referring expression "*that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" because he has asked himself whether there is *not anything* of that nature. Since he must first find an answer to the question *before* he can argue anything about God, he infers from the universal proposition implicit in his question that an instance of anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality. It will be shown in §3.5 how he derives that supposition. Stage One is devoted to demonstrating that that supposition is false – nothing more.

To prove what he had claimed by writing (C), Anselm first asserts:

(D) *For if it is solely in the understanding, it can be thought to be also in reality, which is greater.*

I showed in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* that the main clause in (D) is not dependent upon some universal proposition lurking in the background, but is a valid inference from his assuming that "That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding".[36]

The comment "which is greater" is the most controversial proposition in the whole of the *Proslogion*. It has attracted attempts to justify it, none of which are satisfactory. However, that comment is justified. I set out in Appendix A how it can be demonstrated that if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality. That justification is much simpler than how I deduced that implication in my previous book.

It follows that if *it can be thought* that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, *it can be thought* to be greater than if it were solely in the understanding. So, it follows from (D) that:

36 Richard Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments: A Vindication of his Proof of the Existence of God,* pp. 99–102.

(E) *Therefore, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding, then that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is* [something] *than which a greater can be thought.*[37]

That follows because if it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *solely* in the understanding – that is, that it is in the understanding, but not in reality – it can be thought that something is greater than it. It is a logical truth that if it can be thought that something is greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, then that thing itself is identical to something *x* than which a greater can be thought, which is what (E) says.

Anselm validly infers from the contradiction in (E) that "*That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality*". He then generalizes that to "*Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the understanding and in reality*", so that he can discharge the assumption that "*That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding*". So he validly concludes that:

> *There exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, both in the understanding and in reality.*

6.2 *Stage Two*

Although Anselm has proven that something of that nature *is* in reality, he cannot *immediately* conclude that it is God. For there is nothing in the proof so far which ensures that *only one* being is such that nothing greater can be thought. As already noted, because his so-called formula is an *indefinite* description, it does not rule out the possibility that there might be multiple beings, all of which might be thought to be equally great!

That is why Anselm must adopt a three-stage strategy if he is to prove that God truly exists. He must *demonstrate* – and not just assert – how the conclusion of Stage One is relevant to God. Since there is no valid argument for the existence of God in *Proslogion* II, the only way to *establish* that conclusion is to establish that something than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has some characteristic which he can subsequently show to be true only of God. Provided he can do that, he can then – but only then – argue that God

37 In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I translated the latter part of this sentence as "that same thing than which a greater cannot be thought is *that* than which a greater cannot be thought" (2018, p. 15). That was an error. The pronoun "*id*" is not in the text; "[something]" is the more appropriate word to supply, as Ian Logan does in his translation *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 33.

is uniquely something than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and therefore that God exists.

The characteristic Anselm discerns is "being unable to be thought not to exist". For in *Reply* IV Anselm says that that is a distinctive property of God. His proof of the existence of God, therefore, must consist of three stages; no other strategy would logically be sound.

When interest in Anselm's argument was revived in the 1960s by Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne, it was not clear whether he meant the argument in *Proslogion* III to be a complement to the argument advanced in *Proslogion* II, or whether it represents an independent proof in its own right, as Max Charlesworth observed in his 1965 translation and commentary.[38] That is not surprising, for the sentence in which Anselm introduces the premise of Stage Two has been consistently mistranslated, as I shall show in §6.1.

Ever since I published *From Belief to Understanding* in 1976 I have maintained that the sentence in which Anselm declares the premise of Stage Two has an implicit subject which refers to the subject of the conclusion of Stage One. Thus, when fully articulated, his Stage Two premise is:

> *If there exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, both in the understanding and in reality, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.*

In Chapter Six of *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I demonstrated, by adapting an obscure argument which Anselm presents in *Reply* IX, how the premise of Stage Two his premise, when construed as I have always insisted, is deducible from the strong conclusion of Stage One, that:

> *It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.*

I believe that that was a significant discovery, for it settles the much-debated issue of whether the argument in the first half of *Proslogion* III is a second, and independent, proof. I then set out Stage Two of Anselm's proof, which he writes in the first half of *Proslogion* III, in the same way as I had his Stage One proof. Although that deduction is valid, it is long and complicated.

Since writing that book I have made two more discoveries about Stage Two which greatly simplify how that argument may be reconstructed. I have now discerned a much simpler way of deducing the premise of Stage Two from that

38 Charlesworth, *St Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 73.

stronger conclusion of Stage One, without having to adapt his *Reply* IX argument. In Chapter 4 Anselm's original Stage One will be reformulated to deduce in §4.9 a conclusion even stronger than that just cited. I then show in §6.2 how his Stage Two premise is entailed by the Stage One conclusion deduced in §4.9.

My second discovery is that it is possible to reconstruct how Anselm validly deduces the interim conclusion of Stage Two in a much simpler way than I did in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. In Stage Two Anselm asserts:

> *Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, this same thing than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought, which cannot be consistent.*

I have discovered that it is possible to deduce that contradiction, and therefore the interim conclusion of Stage Two from Anselm's claim in Stage One: that if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality.[39] Discovering that has enabled me to present in Chapter 6 a cosmologically-based Stage Two argument in a much shorter and more transparent way than the reconstruction of Stage Two which I presented in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*.

When Anselm's Stage Two premise is construed as I have just reiterated, the contradiction in the previous quote can validly be deduced. From that contradiction it validly follows that:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.*

That is the actual conclusion of Anselm's Stage Two. It turns out that it is entailed by the same premises as entail the conclusion of Stage One.

6.3 *Stage Three*

Having established his Stage Two conclusion, Anselm is ready to resume his prayer. For in the middle of *Proslogion* III he declares to God two conclusions which follow from what he has just proven:

> *And this is You, Lord our God. Therefore, Lord my God, You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.*

39 As mentioned above in §1.6.1, that claim is validated in Appendix A.

However, those conclusions cannot just be asserted; they too must be established by argumentation. That is the task for Stage Three. So, he writes two sentences to explain why those two conclusions are true. Those two sentences are:

> *For if some mind could think of something better than You, a creature would be ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, which is completely absurd. And indeed, whatever is other than You alone can be thought not to exist.*

The first of those sentences consists of an implication and a comment. So, it looks like it is a little argument in itself. Because it explicitly assumes that God is the Creator, both in *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I called this his "theological argument". It is clear that Anselm is inferring from that absurdity that:

> *It is not possible that some mind can think of something better than You.*

However, it is not so clear what point he is making by inferring that. As will be seen in §2.5, Anselm explains in *Reply* VIII how any rational mind is able to conceive of something than which nothing greater could be thought by ascending in thought from thinking of lesser goods to thinking of goods which are better, until eventually an apex is reached where it is not possible to think of anything better. So, it seems that Anselm is inferring from the impossibility of thinking of something better than the Creator that "You are something than which a greater cannot be thought".

Since that first sentence does not entail the second conclusion Anselm has declared unless it is supplemented, I used to think that that is why he offers that second reason. His two conclusions are entailed simply by the conclusion of Stage Two and this second premise which needs to assert only that:

> *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

Since the subject of that premise is not "You" but "*Whatever is other than You*", I called this Anselm's "metaphysical argument". When this premise is read as minimally as this, it proves to be very powerful, because, together with the conclusion of Stage Two, it entails the two conclusions he had announced. After asserting his two reasons, he draws a third conclusion:

> *You alone have being most truly of all and most greatly of all, because whatever is other than You does not exist so truly and for that reason has less being.*

Anselm's strategy of presenting his proof in three stages is clear, logically valid, and brilliantly conceived. Unlike the invalid ontological argument standardly attributed to Anselm, the three-stage proof he actually presents *is valid*. It is well past time for that misrepresentation to be abandoned. Anyone who chooses to discuss Anselm's proof of the existence of God needs to address the argumentation he actually presents, and cease recycling the travesty it is usually alleged to be.

CHAPTER 2

Introducing a Cosmological Reformulation of Anselm's Proof

Since, as I have shown, Anselm's proof of the existence of God is not contained in *Proslogion* II, and that its first premise is not a definition, or 'a conceptual truth', or 'something like a definition', it is not 'the ontological argument' which is falsely attributed to him. But if that is so, what sort of an argument is it?

In this chapter I shall explain why I have come to understand it to be a quite novel form of a cosmological argument. At least, it is not an argument in which all the premises are known to be true *a priori*. It is more like what Kant labelled 'cosmological arguments', although they are causal arguments, whereas Anselm's proof is not. That is why I have said it is a 'quite novel' form of a cosmological argument. I will explain why I have written yet another book about Anselm's proof, in which his proof will be reformulated in such a way that it is not vulnerable to the major objection which is regularly levelled against it.

1 Inferring That Something Is in Reality from Its Being in the Understanding

The major objection to Anselm's proof is directed at his deducing, first of all, that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, and then deducing from that that it is also in reality. This objection is levelled against his proof by many critics, of whom Gaunilo was the first. They all insist that it is simply not possible validly to deduce that anything is in reality without basing that deduction on factual evidence concerning something which is already in reality. None of the critics are impressed by the contention that such an inference is valid only in the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. It will be shown in Chapter 7, however, that Anselm succeeds in demonstrating the uniqueness of his Stage One argument.

As I reported in the Preface, I was provoked to write this third book on Anselm's proof of the existence of God because of conversations with my close friend, the Supreme Court judge Ken Crispin. For he too cannot accept that it is possible for Anselm, or anyone else, to prove that anything is in reality without producing some factual evidence which put such a claim beyond reasonable doubt. As he has written in a recent book:

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> In the absence of proven factual premises, neither the clarity nor the rational coherence of an idea can establish that there is an objective reality that coincides with it.[1]

For that reason, he does not agree that Anselm has proven that God exists. He accepts that I have demonstrated that the argument standardly attributed to Anselm is not what he actually wrote, and he accurately reports the exegesis I presented in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. But he remains unconvinced, because even when Anselm's proof is construed as a three-stage argument, its first stage purports to deduce that something is in reality merely from its being thought. He argues that:

> One may postulate the existence of something than which no greater can be thought and go on to postulate that such a being exists in reality and not in the mind alone. But it would still be a postulation. The thought would still be a thought. The reality would still be a postulated reality. And there would be no logical basis for an assumption that there is an actual reality that corresponds with the postulated reality. One can neither think something into existence nor, in the absence of evidence, prove that something exists by thinking alone.[2]

This objection shows how easy it is to misunderstand Anselm's argument. Anselm does not 'postulate' the existence of something than which no greater can be thought. He *assumes* that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding – that is, that it is in the understanding, but *not* in reality. He introduces that assumption because if he is to deduce any conclusion from a proposition with "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" as its subject, he must assume a singular proposition the subject of which is an exemplar of that indefinite description. That is a rule of inference well recognized by modern logicians. It seems that Anselm intuitively was aware that such a procedure is the only way that he could construct a valid argument from a proposition with that indefinite description as its subject.

Anselm then infers that it *can be thought* to be in reality. That inference is sound, for it would be false only if it were *impossible* that that thing is in reality. He then says, "which is greater", that is, he has inferred that *if* it were in reality, it would be greater than if it were solely in the understanding. But he does not infer from that that this thing is in reality. What he infers from it is that

1 Ken Crispin, *A Sceptic's Guide to Belief*, p. 94.
2 Crispin, *A Sceptic's Guide*, p. 93.

if it *can be thought* to be in reality, then it *can be thought* to be greater than if it were solely in the understanding. That follows with impeccable logic. But what those inferences show is that something can be thought to be greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Since that cannot be, it follows inexorably that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the understanding and in reality.

Since that conclusion does not mention or depend upon any proposition which mentions the singular term, "*that* than which a greater cannot be thought", the assumption from which it has been deduced may validly be discharged, and that conclusion may be reaffirmed as entailed by the proposition "*Something* than which greater cannot be thought is in the understanding", which follows from the belief he initially declared:

> (B) *And indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

That is the "logical basis" for his conclusion. But nowhere has Anselm *assumed* "that there is an actual reality that corresponds with the postulated reality". Anselm does not assert any *correspondence* between 'an actual reality' and 'a postulated reality'. His conclusion is that *the very same thing* which is in his understanding is *also* in reality. There is no room for talk of 'correspondence' here. That something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *both* in the understanding and in reality is not an 'assumption'; it is a validly deduced consequence.

Crispin's objection is typical of countless others. That objection is repeated time and again, and I predict, will not go away, for it is as deeply embedded in the minds of critics as is the received misinterpretation itself. An American colleague once put the following principle to me:

> The relation between thinking and the existence of anything other than thinking itself is a contingent one.

I call that the Empiricists' Principle. If that principle were *universally* applicable, then Anselm could not derive any existential conclusion from the argument in *Proslogion* II. The critics say: there must be some error in his reasoning. However, it is not enough for them to *assert* that no existential conclusions can ever be deduced from what is being thought of. Simply to insist on that, without attempting to justify that insistence, is to beg the question at issue.

In any case, that principle is simply false. It conveniently overlooks the fact that it is valid to infer from a contradiction that reality is *not* as described

by that contradiction. Maybe the critics would not accept contradictions as counter-examples to their principle on the grounds that they are negative.

But even if contradictions are not accepted as counterexamples, there is a positive counter-example which infers the existence of something from thinking. It is Descartes' famous "*cogito ergo sum*" ["I think, therefore I am"]. Descartes' argument is based on the fact that he has not been able to rule out the possibility that there is a malignant demon who deceives him every time he performs the addition "2 + 3". But, Descartes says, even if he is being deceived, he is still thinking, and that demonstrates his existence.

So, Anselm's argument is not the only one which validly infers existence from thinking. In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I defended the validity of the argumentation in Anselm's Stage One argument, and I have not found any reason since to think otherwise. I do not accept the objections levelled against it.

There is an interesting anticipation of Descartes' "*cogito ergo sum*" in the exchange between Gaunilo and Anselm which provoked Anselm to present an important argument in *Reply* IV. Gaunilo had suggested that instead of saying, as Anselm had,

> that this supreme thing [*summa res ista*] could not be *thought* not to exist, it would perhaps have been better said that it could not be *understood* that it does not exist or that it even could be non-existent.

Anselm immediately saw that this suggestion undermines the three-stage strategy he had adopted to prove the existence of God, and developed an argument in *Reply* IV designed to defend that strategy. What is relevant here is that Gaunilo supports his suggestion by remarking that "I do not know whether I *could think* that I do not exist, while I know with absolute certainty that I do". Immediately after articulating an argument which concludes with "*All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme*", Anselm rebukes Gaunilo for saying that he does not know whether he could think that he does not exist.

It might seem from this that Anselm would not recognize Descartes' *cogito* argument as another example of inferring existence from thinking. However, both Gaunilo's speculation and Descartes' *cogito* argument depend on their considering a proposition expressed in first-person grammar: "I think". They both exploit the fact that the person who says "I" must exist in order to say, "I think". On the other hand, Anselm's argument in *Reply* IV is expressed in third-person grammar. He is claiming that all those persons who exist at some time can be thought not to exist, for they have all been born and will die.

The validity of Anselm's three-stage proof depends upon that's being true of everything other than God.[3]

It will be shown in §2.5 how Anselm grounds the concept of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought in reality. So, when he infers from the fact that such a thing is in the understanding that it is also in reality, he is drawing out an implication which has already been built into the way that concept can be inferred. There is nothing tricky, no illicit slides, in his Stage One argument; it is a valid deduction of what is already implicit in the concept of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought itself. Anselm's claim that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be greater if it were in reality than if it were only in the understanding is validated in Appendix A, and that there is nothing else in the argument which is open to reasonable objection. His premises are plausible, and his conclusion is validly deduced from just four premises.

Indeed, it will be shown in Chapter 7 that Anselm himself effectively demonstrated in *Reply* III why this inference cannot validly be applied to anything other than something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought. But because it is standardly accepted that his proof of the existence of God is confined to *Proslogion* II, the critics fail to see the relevance of what he argues in *Reply* III.

However, I recognize that even when Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II is understood properly as the first stage of a three-stage proof, it is true that it does not cite any *factual evidence* which implies that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality. Thus it remains exposed to the objection that it purports to prove the existence of something without citing any factual evidence in support of that conclusion.

So, I concede that my legal friend has a point. Anselm's argument would be even more plausible if the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could be proven on the basis of factual evidence which is beyond reasonable doubt (to cite a legal phrase).

2 Discovering That Anselm's Proof Is a Cosmological Argument

I asked in the introduction to this chapter the question: If Anselm's proof of the existence of God is not 'the ontological argument' which is falsely attributed to him. what sort of an argument is it?

3 The uniqueness of Anselm's proof will be demonstrated in Chapter 7, and his *Reply* IV argument will be examined in Chapter 9.

It is obvious that Anselm's Stage Three premise – "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist" – is not a truth which is known *a priori*. That shows that his proof in the *Proslogion* cannot possibly be a version of 'the ontological argument'. For there is nothing else in the *Proslogion* which establishes the uniqueness of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and that it is identical to the God whom Anselm is addressing. This premise is critical if he is to succeed in proving that God exists. It is therefore disconcerting that in *Proslogion* III Anselm introduces such a powerful premise without any justification. For that reason, in Chapter 10 I shall present an argument designed to justify this crucial premise.

Anselm did, however, devote considerable space in *Reply* I to discussing the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist, and in *Reply* IV he presented the argument to explain why he cannot accept Gaunilo's suggestion, reported above, that it would be better to say that 'this supreme thing' [*summa res ista*] could not be *understood* not to exist, instead of saying, as Anselm does, that God could not be *thought* not to exist. The character of the criteria which Anselm identified in *Reply* I is unmistakably cosmological. That is made clear by his explicitly arguing that:

> *Even if it should be said that time always exists and the world* [mundus] *exists everywhere, yet the former does not always exist as a totality* [totum], *nor is the latter everywhere as a totality* [totum].

The reason why time and the world can be thought not to exist is because they are extended. For he supports that claim by explaining in *Reply* I that:

> *And just as the separate parts of time do not exist when the others exist, so they could be thought of as never existing. And so separate parts of the world, just as they do not exist where the others exist, could be understood as existing nowhere.*

In *Reply* IV Anselm returns to the topic of what can be thought not to exist, summarizing these criteria as:

> *Indeed, all those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end, or are a conjunction of parts – as I have already said, what does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality – can be thought not to exist.*

These criteria are applicable to everything in the universe. Since he had argued in *Reply* I that time and the world can be thought not to exist, they are included

amongst "All things" which is the subject of that premise. He then asserts as a second premise that:

> *That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking* [cogitatio] *finds neither beginning nor end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality.*

He concludes from those two premises that:

> *All things can be thought not exist, apart from that which is supreme.*

This argument will be examined in detail in Chapter 9. I have reported it here because Anselm presented this argument in order to explain to Gaunilo why he presented his proof of the existence of God in the three stages evident in *Proslogion* II and III.

Since Gaunilo himself accepts that God is 'this supreme thing', the truth of that thesis is what enables Anselm to demonstrate that God exists. For having proven that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it *could not* be thought not to exist, he could then argue that, God alone is this thing and therefore so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist. So his proof of the existence of God turns upon this thesis, that it is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist. Since the logic of his argumentation rests on the cosmological criteria he articulates in *Reply* I, his proof is manifestly not a version of the so-called 'ontological argument'.

But if the argumentative strategy underlying his proof in *Proslogion* II and III is dependent upon its being a distinctive property of God that only He could not be thought not to exist, what sort of proof is it? Pondering that question, I realized that there are two grounds for considering the proposition "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist" to be the premise of a cosmological argument.

The first ground is that I recognized that the subject of his Stage Three premise – "Whatever is other than You" – refers to all things, apart from the God whom Anselm is addressing. Since the subject of that premise encompasses the universe and everything in it, I saw that that premise is cosmological in its scope.

The second ground is that Anselm presents in *Reply* IV an argument based on criteria he established in *Reply* I which determine what can be thought not to exist. Those criteria imply that all things, including 'the world' and time, can be thought not to exist – apart from that which is supreme. That is clearly a

cosmological argument. Since Anselm uses the same word "*praeter*" to mean "apart from" both in his Stage Three premise and his *Reply* IV conclusion, it seemed reasonable to interpret that argument as designed to rectify his omitting to justify that premise in *Proslogio*n III. It will be shown in Chapters Nine and Ten that establishing the truth of his crucial Stage Three premise is rather more complicated than appears from this preliminary sketch, but what has already been said is enough to establish that Anselm's proof of the existence of God is cosmological in character, and not the 'ontological argument' which it is still mispresented as being.

Having recognized how very different Anselm's argument is from what it has been misunderstood to be, I found myself considering the first two stages of his argument in a quite different light. His Stage One premises simply report a scenario in which Anselm imagines that he is praying aloud, and the Fool is present and has heard what Anselm has said. While that scenario is imaginary, the propositions which describe it are also not *a priori* truths. That is why in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I asserted that:[4]

> *Anselm's Argument for the existence of God is a unique version of the Cosmological Argument.*

I recognize that my interpretation of Anselm's proof is provocative. Not unexpectedly, some readers have found that interpretation bizarre. After all, 'everyone knows' that Anselm's argument is a version of 'the ontological argument'; all the textbooks, innumerable articles, and websites say so! Geo Siegwart has written to me to say that

> The reclassification of Anselm's considerations as a cosmological proof seems to me counter-intuitive in a strict sense. "Whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist", is, according to my feeling for language, anything but cosmological: We are talking about God and about the fact that man or the creature cannot perform an action, more precisely an act of thinking.[5]

Of course, that premise is *indirectly* about God and about what humans can and cannot think with understanding. But Siegwart's comment takes no account of the fact that the *subject* of Anselm's premise is "*Whatever is other than You*". It cannot be denied that the reference of that phrase encompasses the whole

4 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 445.

5 Personal email, 27 February 2020.

universe and everything in it. This premise is certainly not an analytic proposition, nor is it a truth known *a priori*. So it is not possible that Anselm's proof of the existence of God is correctly classified as a version of what Kant called 'the ontological argument'.

3 Objections to Interpreting Anselm's Stage Three as a Metaphysical Argument

When I was writing *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I was aware that some commentators objected strongly to my interpreting the second reason Anselm had offered as validly justifying the two claims he had made in the middle of *Proslogion* III. Partly this was another issue of translation. Anselm had written:

(L) *Et quidem quicquid est aliud praeter te solum, potest cogitari non esse.*

All the English translations, bar one, translate that sentence, with only minor variations, as:

> *And indeed, except for You alone, whatever else exists can be conceived not to exist.*[6]

This is a possible translation. When translated that way, the main claim which (L) makes is that "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist". However, the parenthetical clause, "except for You alone", qualifies that claim by adding that there is one exception: "*You alone* cannot be thought not to exist". That second claim is the very conclusion which this argument is meant to establish. Had Anselm intended this sentence to be read as it has been translated, he would have been assuming the very conclusion he is trying to prove. That would be disastrous.

Since I could not believe that Anselm would have sabotaged his argument by such carelessness, in *From Belief to Understanding* I interpreted this sentence as making the minimal claim that anything which is not identical to God can be thought not to exist. That interpretation has since been confirmed by Ian Logan's translation of this sentence. For he translates the sentence (L) as

6 As translated, for example, in Jasper Hopkins & Herbert W. Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 1, p. 95.

> *And indeed, whatever is other than You alone can be thought not to exist.*[7]

That too is a possible translation, and there are strong reasons to prefer Logan's translation over all the others. It has the merit of preserving Anselm's word order. It interprets its subject as "Whatever is other than God", with no parenthetical clause. I showed in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* that the word "alone" plays no role in the argument which follows from this proposition when it is construed as a premise. Anselm includes it because, in his characteristic style, he is anticipating a consequence he is about to prove. Together with the conclusion of Stage Two, this premise validly entails all the conclusions he draws in Stage Three when it is understood as asserting nothing more than:

> *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

Since the subject of this premise does not refer to God – it refers to everything else – I thought Anselm had very cleverly found a premise which mentions God but did not presuppose that God exists, in order to prove that God exists.

Nevertheless, it is a very strong premise, so it is no wonder that some commentators find such a claim to be objectionable. For example, in an extensive review of *From Belief to Understanding*, Jasper Hopkins objected that

> Anselm needs to establish not simply that "anything which is not God can be thought not to exist". He needs to establish that "because God *alone* is something than which a greater cannot be thought, anything which is not God can be thought not to exist". For if more than one thing is such that it is something than which a greater cannot be thought, or if God is not something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it is not the case that God alone cannot be thought not to exist. But nowhere in *Proslogion* 3 – not even in this alleged second leg of reasoning – does Anselm, in a non-circular or non-question-begging way, establish (as opposed to assume) either that only one thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought or that God Himself is something than which a greater cannot be thought.[8]

That is David Smith's objection too. He too notes that I had focused on this as constituting a last crucial step in Anselm's proof of God's existence, but does not find it acceptable. Unlike Hopkins, Smith takes into account the various

7 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 34.

8 Jasper Hopkins, *A New Interpretative Translation of Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion*, p. 11.

passages in the *Reply* where Anselm argues that anything which has a beginning or an end, or has parts (including temporal parts), or is spatially circumscribed, can be conceived not to exist, and comments:

> Moreover these passages are purely 'philosophical' in character. So, if it can be shown that God alone cannot conceivably meet any of these conditions, He alone cannot be conceived not to exist, and the argument for God's existence would be complete.[9]

Smith concedes that Anselm's list of conditions which allow a thing to be conceived as nonexistent is exhaustive. Yet he too maintains that they are not *sufficient* to justify Anselm's crucial proposition. For he objects:

> Not only, however, does Anselm never present this argument, how might he have thought that he could convince someone without faith, such as the Fool, of this crucial last thesis: that God cannot be conceived not to exist? Of course, if God is something than which a greater cannot be conceived, Anselm could doubtless argue, on purely 'rational' grounds, that God cannot conceivably meet any of the condition, because this is greater than conceivably meeting any of them. But this just brings us around in a circle to the identification of God with *G* [= something than which a greater cannot be conceived] that is the very point at issue.[10]

I have insisted that there is no evidence in the text that Anselm has the slightest interest in trying to convince the Fool of anything. I suspect that Smith's assumption that that is what Anselm is trying to do is what has led him to assert that Anselm never presents the required argument.

That quibble aside, Smith is quite wrong to assert that "Anselm never presents this argument". The argument Anselm presents in Stage Three is the very argument which proves that God could not be thought not to exist. That argument is valid provided his premise is interpreted minimally as referring only to "Whatever is other than You". I shall argue below that it is a logical error to interpret it as *also* asserting, or presupposing, that God cannot be thought not to exist.

Nor is Smith correct in saying that Anselm never presents an argument based on the list of conditions which allow a thing to be conceived as nonexistent. Anselm presents the argument in *Reply* IV, quoted above, to prove that

9 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 14.
10 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 14.

very conclusion. It is true that it concludes with inferring that 'that which is supreme' is the only being which cannot be thought not to exist, but Anselm does assert in *Reply* IV that it is a unique property of God that only He cannot be thought not to exist.

Howbeit, Smith concludes,

> I find nothing in Anselm's work to conflict with Barth's reading of the situation: "How do we know that God's real name is *quo maius cogitari nequit*? We know it because that is how God has revealed himself and because we believe him as he has revealed himself".[11]

What these objections are demanding is that Anselm establish that it is *because* God alone is something than which a greater cannot be thought that whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist. That would require him to prove the conclusion which he deduces from this premise in order to assert it as a premise. That requirement is not reasonable.

However, the unreasonableness of that requirement is not why I have quoted these objections at some length. The accusation that Anselm's premise presupposes that God alone cannot be thought not to exist is much more serious than that. For were his premise also asserting, or presupposing, that God alone cannot be thought not to exist, it would manifestly beg the question. That would be a fatal flaw because his argument would be invalid, and he would have failed to prove that God exists.

However, while it is true that Anselm's use of the pronoun "You" presupposes that the God whom Anselm is addressing exists, and the previous sentence assumes that God is the Creator, it is a logical error to allege that the premise under discussion presupposes that God cannot be thought not to exist. The objections of Hopkins and Smith are more than unreasonable; they misconstrue the logical of Anselm's proof. For Anselm's premise does not assert or presuppose that God cannot be thought not to exist.

The point is that the contrapositive of any proposition is equivalent to the original.[12] So, Anselm's premise is equivalent to: "Whatever cannot be thought not to exist is none other than You". It is easy to mistake that as either asserting or presupposing that God cannot be thought not to exist. But that is an

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11 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 14, quoting Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* in the translation by Ian W, Robinson, p. 152.

12 All conditional propositions have a contrapositive. The contrapositive of "If *p*, then *q*" is "If not-*q*, then not-*p*".

incorrect interpretation. Anselm's premise does not assert or presuppose that there exists *anything* which cannot be thought not to exist, let alone that God. For what his premise is equivalent to is:

> *If* anything cannot be thought not to exist, it is none other than You.

That leaves wide open the question whether anything exists which cannot be thought not to exist. This is the most decisive reason for accepting Logan's translation, and rejecting all the others, for, thus construed, it makes no assertion about God. When Anselm invokes that proposition as a premise, he is not necessarily begging the question.

Nor does Anselm need to show that God *alone* cannot conceivably meet any of the conditions which, in the *Reply*, he presented as the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist in order for his argument to be complete, as Smith alleged.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter 8, all Anselm's proof requires is that his Stage Three premise be equivalent to the conditional proposition: "*If* anything cannot be thought not to exist, it is none other than You". For he has already established independently that there *does* exist something which could not be thought not to exist. That is implied by the conclusion of Stage Two. That conclusion and this premise together entail that "You alone so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist".

It does follow that *if* God cannot be thought not to exist, and if everything else can be thought not to exist, it would be a property unique to God that He could not be so thought, as Anselm asserts in *Reply* IV. But when he writes the *Reply*, Anselm already has proven in *Proslogion* III that God alone so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist. The condition required by both Hopkins and Smith – that if Anselm's premise is to be acceptable he must first show that God alone cannot be thought not to exist – is not only unreasonable, but it is also a serious misinterpretation of the premise by which Anselm proves the existence of God.

Nevertheless, it remains disconcerting that in *Proslogion* III Anselm introduces such a powerful premise without any justification. After reading my exegesis of Stage Three in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, Bernd Goebel contacted me to share his concern that

> … its premise is so strong and is not argued for in P3 at all, that it seems quite pointless to put it forward as an argument. You admit yourself that it asserts, rather than justifies that there is only one thing the non-existence

> of which cannot be thought. If we call *this* a proof, then many assertions that no one would dream of calling a proof would turn out to be proofs as well.[13]

That challenged the interpretation of Anselm's Stage Three which I had maintained for nearly 50 years. It made me contemplate the possibility that I might have misunderstood the character and role of the reasons which Anselm offers for the two conclusions he announced.

The result of my deliberations is that I have now recognized that I have indeed been misunderstanding the nature of this crucial premise. For I have now discerned how Anselm could have derived it. If that surmise is right, his original Stage Three argument in *Proslogion* III is *not* the non-theological, metaphysical argument which I had taken it to be. It is a theological argument based on the cosmological implications of the doctrine of creation.

So, I am now withdrawing my previous exegesis of Anselm's Stage Three argument and adjourning my discussion of Goebel's challenge, and my response, to Chapter 8, where I shall propose a new interpretation of this crucial passage of text. However, this most recent rethink does not detract in any way from the case I have argued in §1.5 showing that the traditional and standard interpretation of Anselm's proof is an invalid caricature.

4 A Three-Stage Cosmological Proof of the Existence of God

Rebutting the objection that Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise begs the question of whether God alone cannot be thought not to exist clears the way to recognizing that it is indeed in the second half of *Proslogion* III that Anselm deduced that God truly exists, which completes his proof. But it remains the case that the other premise Anselm needs to conclude his proof is the conclusion of Stage Two, and in the *Proslogion* his Stage Two conclusion is dependent on the Stage One argument in *Proslogion* II.

Whether Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II is interpreted, fallaciously, as an 'ontological argument' for the existence of God, or, accurately, as Stage One of his three-stage proof, it is still the case that in *Proslogion* II he infers that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality from its being in the understanding. That inference is what so many critics refuse to accept. They are quite unmoved by the contention that the argument which Anselm

13 Personal email, 17 March 2019.

has presented is applicable only to something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. They insist that there just has to be something wrong with it!

Even when it is accepted that Anselm is *not* purporting in *Proslogion* II to prove that God is in reality, it is still the case that he needs Stage One of his proof to establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, so that he can prove that that same indefinitely described thing so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist. Anselm needs that Stage Two conclusion in order to infer later on that God alone is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and therefore exists in the same way. The only fact Anselm cites in the *Proslogion* is the fact that he himself has written the sentence: "We believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought".

Recognizing that the premise of Stage Three could be construed as a cosmological proposition prompted me to begin experimenting to see whether the conclusions of Stages One and Two could *also* be deduced from a premise which is cosmological in character. For if it could be established that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality without inferring that conclusion from its being in the understanding, the most fundamental objection levelled against Anselm's argument becomes simply irrelevant. To reformulate his proof in that way would circumvent the objection discussed in §2.1 which is focussed on the argument in *Proslogion* II, that no conclusion about what is in reality can validly be deduced from premises which are entirely about what is thought. That is what has led to the writing this book.

Since the current state of debate over the soundness of Anselm's inference continues to be one of implacable opposition, I am proposing to set aside Anselm's original Stage One argument in order to sidestep that contentious issue. That is why I am about to reformulate his proof so that it is not dependent upon the argument which Anselm presented in *Proslogion* II.

It is a fact that we are surrounded by myriads of things which come into existence and cease to exist. Indeed, that seems to be true of everything in the universe, and that entails that everything in the universe is able not to exist, and therefore can be thought not to exist. On this basis, I thought it should be possible to demonstrate, using Anselm's indefinite description and his argumentative strategies, that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

That we are surrounded by things which come into existence and cease to exist is not only a truth based on our empirical experience, but it is confirmed as a universal truth about every observable thing in the universe by developments in modern cosmology. Throughout the 20th Century both theoretical developments concerning the physics of space and time, and astronomical

discoveries, have led to a new and radically different understanding of cosmology. Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, coupled with almost a century of astronomical evidence, indicates that the universe in which we live is expanding – indeed, it now appears that the rate of its expansion is increasing. Moreover, there is a theorem which, when expressed non-technically, states that if the universe is, on average, expanding, then its history cannot be indefinitely projected into the past. That theorem implies that the past of the universe is finite. While we will see that it is problematic to say that the universe as a whole had a beginning, that theorem implies that every observable thing in the universe has a beginning. I review these developments in modern cosmology in Chapter 4.

Since every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time does not exist at some previous time, I had found the premise for which I was looking:

> (1) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

From that premise I have been able to demonstrate that:

> It is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.

That conclusion will be proven in Chapter 4.

In making this proposal I am not conceding that the critics' objections are sound. But if the conclusions of both Stages One and Two of his proof of the existence of God can be established in a way which avoids engaging with that contentious issue, the power of that proof can be discerned without that distraction. The most fundamental objection levelled against Anselm's argument would then become simply irrelevant.

Since Anselm's Stage Two is dependent upon his Stage One conclusion, it might be expected that in this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, a Stage Two argument can be constructed which likewise depends on what has been proven in Chapter 4. In fact, as will be shown in Chapter 6, the cosmologically-based premises which in Chapter 4 entail Anselm's Stage One conclusion also entail his Stage Two conclusion:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.*

That will establish that both those conclusions are dependent upon the premise that every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning. Anselm's Stage Two conclusion is one of two premises which are crucial for his deduction in Stage Three of the two conclusions he addresses to God. Since his Stage Two conclusion is dependent upon the premise that everything in the observable universe has a beginning, any Stage Three conclusion deduced from it will also be dependent upon that premise.

The other crucial premise for Anselm's Stage Three in the *Proslogion* is the one discussed above, that:

> *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

As was mentioned above, Anselm deduced that "All things can be thought not exist, apart from that which is supreme" from two premises. As mentioned in §2.2, the first premise is a summary of the criteria he identifies in *Reply* 1:

> *All those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end, or are a conjunction of parts – that is, what does not exist somewhere and at some time in its entirety – can be thought not to exist.*

The second premise is:

> *That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking* [cogitatio] *finds neither beginning nor end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality.*

That asserts that the property of being unable to be thought not to exist is uniquely instantiated. But why can that property be instantiated only uniquely? Anselm does not even try to explain that. I shall explain in Chapter 9 that I have found some considerations in the *Monologion*, which can be invoked in support of that premise. However, those arguments in the *Monologion* presuppose that the Supreme Being exists, and is the Creator of everything else, those considerations cannot be invoked to justify Anselm's Stage Three premise, since he needs that premise to establish that God exists, which is the aim of Stage Three.

Pondering that problem, it occurred to me that the very concept of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought entails that *if* only one thing exists than which a greater cannot be thought, it would exist supremely. I shall present in Chapter 10 an argument modelled on one Anselm deploys

in *Proslogion* XV which will demonstrate that it can be inferred from his Stage Two conclusion that only one being can be something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. That suffices to justify Anselm's claim in *Reply* IV that:

> *All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme.*

Once something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has been identified with "You, Lord our God" without begging the question of His existence, that will not only vindicate Anselm's crucial premise, but also all three conclusions he draws in *Proslogion* III about God. That will suffice to repair the cosmological argument which Anselm presents in *Reply* IV.

Anticipating what has yet to be shown, since the argument which Anselm presents in *Proslogion* III is not the same as the cosmological argument he presents in *Reply* IV, once the latter is repaired, Anselm has two, quite different, Stage Three arguments from which to conclude that:

> *It is necessary that You, Lord our God, alone are something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and therefore You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.*

That led me to see how those two, very different, arguments could be brought together within a broader, overarching framework. That will be shown in Chapter 10. I submit that it will provide an extraordinarily strong justification of his Stage Three premise from which the two conclusions he announced in the middle of *Proslogion* III quickly follow.

That is just a sketch of my reformulation of Anselm's proof of the existence of God. The conclusions of all three stages will be deduced from the premise that every observable thing in the universe has a beginning. Since that premise asserts a strongly confirmed fact, the conclusions it entails are also established facts. Hence this book presents a cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof which demonstrates that it is also true that *God exists*.

Accordingly, in this book I shall present arguments inferred from that premise for each of the conclusions of Anselm's three stages. Although these arguments will employ his indefinite description, they will not purport to infer the existence of something from any premise asserting that it is in the understanding. Rather, they will deploy Anselm's concepts and ways of reasoning to yield a three-stage argument for the existence of God which can in no way be said to be *a priori*. That will show how Anselm's argumentation can be reformulated as a novel cosmological argument. It seemed to me that these discoveries were

more than enough to justify writing a sequel to *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. This book presents the results of that investigation.

To be clear, I am *not* presenting the cosmological reformulation of that proof as an alternative *exegesis* of Anselm's proof. For my reformulation is based on a quite different initial premise. Rather, I am presenting it as a way of showing how Anselm's indefinite description, his argumentative strategies, his way of deploying such basic concepts as possibility, conceivability, and understanding, and his innovative rule of inference, can be developed so that his original proof is not vulnerable to the objections of so many critics. In doing that, however, I will be exploring the depths of his distinctive and powerful metaphysics which has been quite obscured by centuries of misunderstanding.

Although my alternative proof proceeds from an initial premise different from those on which Anselm based his *Proslogion* proof, I claim that the three-stage argument presented in Chapters Four, Six and Ten are thoroughly Anselmian, in five respects.

– *Firstly*, the arguments I am about to present all use his so-called formula: "Something than which a greater cannot be thought".
– *Secondly*, like the original argument which Anselm presented in the *Proslogion*, the reformulation of that argument I am about to present consists in three stages, the conclusions of which are identical to the conclusions of each of his three stages.
– *Thirdly*, the validity of these deductions will be demonstrated by employing the same logical rules of inference as he employs in the *Proslogion*. All bar one of these rules are widely acknowledged by philosophers and logicians to be valid. The sole exception is a rule which is Anselm's own innovation, but I argue in §3.8 that it too warrants being acknowledged as valid.
– *Fourthly*, the reformulated argument I shall be presenting deploys the same argumentative strategies which he characteristically deployed. In that way, my argument is modelled on his.
– *Finally*, although Anselm did not present the argument which I shall present here, all of the concepts I shall be deploying can be found in his texts.

Given all that, I believe that I am entitled to describe this as a genuinely Anselmian cosmological argument.

Accordingly, the argument presented here will pose a challenge to the orthodox misunderstanding of what kind of an argument Anselm's proof is. Since all those conclusions can be shown to follow from this cosmologically supported premise, that strengthens the case for reassessing Anselm's *Proslogion* argument. For it will show that his way of thinking, at its fundamental level, is far distant from the arguments of Descartes and Leibniz. His intellectual

motivations will be shown to be ontological in a quite different sense from those paradigms of the so-called 'ontological argument'. They are grounded in indisputable facts about the universe, and thus turn out to be surprisingly relevant to our modern understanding of the complex universe in which we live.

But I must emphasize right here at the outset that I am *not* arguing that modern cosmology has established that the universe as a whole had a beginning, and that that is the reason why God exists as its Creator. A few philosophers, and a much larger number of popular preachers, have tried to shore up that traditional causal argument for the existence of God by claiming that modern cosmology has established that the universe had a beginning. But such arguments are not plausible. As will be shown in Chapter 4, modern cosmology *has* not established that the universe had an absolute beginning. Whether the universe as a whole had a beginning is still moot, and is necessarily beyond the domain of the physical sciences. Neither Anselm's original proof, nor this cosmological reformulation of it, invokes the contentious proposition: "Everything which begins to exist is caused to exist". It is arguable that that proposition is true of everything *within* the universe, but to extrapolate it to apply to the universe as a whole would be invalid.

5 Inferring That Something Is So Good That Nothing Greater Could Be Thought

Not only is it possible to deduce the conclusions of each of the three stages in Anselm's proof of the existence of God from a cosmologically based premise, but also Anselm derives the descriptive phrase which is at the heart of his proof – "Something than which a greater cannot be thought" – from considerations which can only be classified as cosmological.

I am aware of only two other scholars who interpret Anselm's proof of the existence of God as *a posteriori*. In a book about the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas, Paul Weingartner discusses Thomas' dismissal of what looks like Anselm's argument.[14] He observes that "Anselm starts his argument with empirical premises": that "we believe that God is something than which nothing greater could be thought", and that the Fool has heard and understood

14 Like so many other – for example, G.R. Evans, *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* – Weingartner identifies Anselm's proof as Thomas's target when, as I have already pointed out, the question Thomas is discussing is whether the existence of God is self-evident. It was Bonaventure who argued this, appropriating Anselm's Stage Three conclusion, and presenting it as a premise.

what Anselm has said.[15] I too have been insisting that Anselm's actual first premise describes an event which is, in principle, empirical, even though it is an imagined event rather than one which actually happened.

Also, I have recently discovered that Marek Otisk has written a book in Czech in which he argues, as I have, that Anselm makes abundantly clear in *Proslogion* I that "he has no *a priori* (i.e. predetermined or preferential) knowledge of God".[16] He then sees clearly in the text of *Proslogion* II that:

> Anselm first rationally proves the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought, and then, when this argument is over, there then occurs the identification with God of the being whose existence has been proven.[17]

Significantly, Otisk is not only making the same point as Weingartner, but also argues that Anselm insists that the concept of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is derived from empirical experience. He begins by drawing attention to *Monologion* I where Anselm argues that:

> *Since it is certain that all good things, if they are compared with one another, are either equally or unequally good, it is necessary that they are all good through* [per] *something which is understood to be the same in these different goods, although sometimes they seem to be called good with respect to different features.*

After elaborating how different things are called good because they have various features which it is good for them to have, Anselm infers towards the end of *Monologion* I that:

> *It is necessary that every useful and every virtuous thing – if they are truly good – must be good through that very thing, whatever it is, through which all goods must be good. But who can doubt that that through which all goods are good is itself a great good? Consequently, it is good through itself* [per se ipsum]*, since every good is good through it.*

15 Paul Weingartner, *God's Existence? Can it be Proven: A Logical Commentary on the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 21–22.

16 Marek Otisk, *Na cestě ke scholastice. Klášterní škola v Le Bec: Lanfrank z Pavie a Anslem z Canterbury*, p. 161.

17 Otisk, *Na cestě ke scholastice*, p. 171 (my translation)..

The relevance of this to the indefinite description which Anselm introduces in the *Proslogion* is that he concludes *Monologion* I by asserting that "*There is, therefore, some one thing which is supremely good and supremely great, that is, the highest of all things which exist*". This argument clearly echoes Plato's argument for the Form of the Good. Anselm continues this theme in *Monologion* II, writing:

> *It follows necessarily that something is supremely great insofar as whatever things are great are great through some one thing which is great in itself. I do not mean great in terms of space, as in some body, but I mean great in the sense that the greater anything is the better, or more excellent, it is – as in the case of wisdom.*

That could not be clearer; the greater anything is the better, or more excellent, it is. Anselm is basing his introduction of some one thing through which all good things are good on the fact that in our ordinary everyday lives we regularly compare one good thing we observe with another. That is a feature of our empirical experience.

Having discussed these passages from the *Monologion*, Otisk then turns to the fulsome explanation Anselm presents in *Reply* VIII of how the concept of something than which nothing greater could be thought can be inferred from the fact that some goods are better than others. Gaunilo had objected, on behalf of the Fool, that he cannot think or have in his understanding what he has heard – the words "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" – since he does not know the thing itself, nor can he conceive of it from thinking about something similar. Anselm responds by explaining how anyone with a rational mind can come to think of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot be-thought. Since it is so important, I will quote the passage at length:

> *For since every lesser good is good insofar as it is similar to a greater good, it is therefore evident to any rational mind that, in ascending from lesser goods to greater goods, we would be able to infer* [conicere] *that than which nothing greater can be thought from those things than which something greater can be thought.*
>
> *Indeed, who – even if he should not believe that what he thinks of is in reality – cannot think that, if something which has a beginning and an end is good, there is a much better good, which, although it begins, nevertheless does not cease? And just as the latter is better than the former, so that which does not have an end or a beginning is better than the latter, even if it should pass from the past through the present into the future. And whether or not*

> *something of this kind is in reality, that which in no way is in need, nor is thought to be changed or to be moved, is very much better than it.*[18]
>
> *Can this not be thought? Or can something greater than this be thought? Or is this not to infer that than which a greater cannot be thought from those things than which a greater can be thought?*
>
> *It is in this way, therefore, that something than which a greater cannot be thought could be inferred* [conici].

Anselm makes it clear in the second paragraph of the passage just quoted that the mental ascent he is describing takes off from empirical reality. What is striking about this passage is that Anselm explains how the concept of something than which nothing greater could be thought can be conceived by inferring it from ranking the 'goods' we encounter in our everyday lives in a hierarchy in which some are 'better' than others.

Otisk insists that the procedure which Anselm adopts is one

> where the basis of the senses is the perceived reality from which we can proceed further or higher. And this procedure is certainly not from concept to reality. Therefore, even these words of Anselm can be cited as further evidence for the perception of Anselm as an author who presented in his *Proslogion* an *a posteriori* proof of God's existence.[19]

Otisk is right to read this *Reply* VIII passage as reasoning *from* the realities we perceive *to* forming a concept of what has been experienced. Thought, ascending in this way, eventually forms the concept of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought. The movement of thought is upwards, from reality towards that concept. For Anselm is inviting anyone with a rational mind to consider next those things which have both a beginning and an end. The

18 Ian Logan in *Reading Anselm's Proslogion* at p. 81, translates "*cogitur mutari vel moveri*" as "is thought to change or be in motion" as if those verbs were in the active voice. Since Anselm has written them in the passive voice, that phrase must be translated as "is thought to be changed or to be moved". Matthew Walz similarly in *Proslogion*, p. 52, translates those verbs as if they were in *both* the active and the passive voice, rendering the clause as "in no manner needs to change or to move or is compelled to do so". Both Hopkins & Richardson in *Anselm of Canterbury*, Vol. One, p. 132, and Williams in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, p. 112, correctly translate those verbs in the passive voice, but omit to translate "*cogitur*". They translate the clause as: "which in no way needs or is compelled to be changed or moved". Anselm's use of the passive voice of those two verbs allows that this thing could change and move itself, whereas Logan's and Walz's translations rule those possibilities out, implying that it is incapable of doing anything.

19 Otisk, *Na cestě ke scholastice*, p. 174 (my translation).

universe is full of such things. Indeed, as I shall argue in Chapter 4, that everything which exists in the universe has a beginning is the empirical truth which is true of more things than any other empirical truth we know.

Having established that we do regularly and unproblematically consider some goods to be better than others, Anselm then says if something which has a beginning and an end is good that it is *possible* for any rational mind to think of something which begins to exist, but having begun, never ceases to exist. He is asking: "Is that not better?" And then it is possible to think of something which exists but does not have *either* a beginning *or* an end. He is then asking: "Is that not even better?" He suggests that even better still is something which is in no way lacking nor is thought to be changed or moved by anything else. So that is how anyone with a rational mind can come to infer the concept "something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought".

It might be objected that this interpretation overlooks the fact that Anselm interpolates the clause, "*even if he should not believe that what he is thinking of is in reality*" into his account of this mental ascent. However, I read him as inserting that remark because he is responding to Gaunilo, who is speaking on behalf of the Fool. The Fool does not believe that there is anything which has neither a beginning nor an end. Anselm is saying that it is irrelevant to anyone's performing this ascent whether he or she *believes* there is a being who has neither a beginning nor an end. It is not necessary to *believe* that there are such things in order to think of such possibilities. All he needs is that it is possible to *think* of such a being. Anselm has to describe this ascent as one made in thought, even if what is being thought of is believed not to be in reality, for otherwise this ascent would not serve to refute what Gaunilo has said on behalf of the Fool: that he cannot conceive that thing than which nothing greater could be thought.

Anselm's claim is that there has to be a limit to this ascent, because eventually a point is reached where it is not possible to think of something better. That limit is based on the greatness of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought, not on the limitations of human thinking. Indeed, he has already spoken in *Reply* IV of something which has neither a beginning or an end, nor is it a conjunction of parts, but is always and everywhere as a totality. He is claiming here that it is not possible to think of anything better than that.

That the concept of something than which nothing greater could be thought is grounded in observable reality in this way is why Anselm can claim in *Proslogion* II that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be 'greater' if it were in reality, as can be thought, than if it were only in the understanding. For he has explained in both the *Monologion* and *Reply* VIII that it is *better* to be in reality than not.

But why is it better to be in reality than not? Because, other things being equal, it is good to be in reality. Any why is it good to be in reality? Because if something were not in reality, quite simply, there would not *be* anything so described. Anselm's inference is as simple and straightforward as that.

Otisk also draws attention to the fact that Anselm concludes his explanation by directing these comments towards two different audiences. Anselm writes immediately after the passage quoted:

> *Thus, even the fool, who does not accept sacred authority, can easily be refuted, if he denies that* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought can be conceived from other things.*

Anselm then appeals to those who *do* accept sacred authority, commenting:

> *But if any Catholic should deny this, let him remember that the invisible things of God and His eternal power are observed from the created things of the world, being understood by means of those things which have been made.*[20]

By reminding his Catholic readers that God is understood through the things which have been made, he is emphasizing that their belief in God is also grounded in empirical experience. So, he has explained to both audiences how it is possible to come to understand what is meant by the description "something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought" through considering what is found in empirical experience.

Given this passage, Otisk is right in contending that the interpretation of *Proslogion* II which takes it to be an inference from thinking to reality ignores the fact that Anselm insists that this concept has itself first been derived from reality. It is for that reason that he argues that the characterization of Anselm's argument as an attempt to prove that God exists from a premise known *a priori* is the reverse of the proper priority. He says:

> Furthermore, the step from thinking to reality is possible only in the context of the very opposite process which has been performed previously, i.e., from reality to thinking. In other words it cannot be forgotten that the

20 Anselm is referring to *Romans* 1:20, where the apostle Paul writes: "Ever since the creation of the world His [i.e., God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they be, have been understood and seen through the things he has made".

> hypothesis examined was dependent upon what is empirical. Without *a posteriori* experience, we could never have come to the hypothesis of something than which nothing greater could be thought. The existence of God can be deduced only from actuality, not simply from the idea of God.[21]

I draw three implications from reflecting on how Anselm is using these terms. Firstly, that which is greater is so because it is *better*, or more excellent, for it to be than not to be. Since "better" is the comparative of "good", for Anselm, being good is implicit in the very meaning of the word "greater".

Secondly, while Anselm is explicating what it means to be greater in terms of being better, or more excellent, he is not comparing something *with something else* in that respect. He is evaluating how good it would be when it itself is considered to have or not to have certain properties. All those alleged 'background premises' which are formulated in terms of something being greater than something else fail to express this aspect of his concept.

Thirdly, it seems that in both the passages quoted above from *Monologion* I, and from *Reply* VIII, that Anselm is reserving the word "*maius*" [great] to describe that than which there is *nothing* better. However, in the passage in *Monologion* II he says that "the greater anything is the better, or more excellent, it is". That suggests that he allows that anything is 'greater' provided it has some property which it is better, or more excellent, to have than not to have, even if it is not the best, or the most excellent.

It is significant that the concept of being greater applies much more widely than simply to the comparison discussed in Stage One. Rather the case dealt with in Stage One is just one instance of what is a more general principle. So, we obviously require an account of the notion of being greater which is *general*. That will be provided in the following chapter.

It is because Anselm grounds the concept of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought in the empirical experience of comparing the good things we find in the world, and reminds those of his readers who are believers that God is to be understood "by means of those things which have been made", that in Stage One he can deduce that that thing is in reality from its being in the understanding. It is for those same reasons that it is possible to reformulate his proof as implied by a premise which is grounded in cosmology.

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21 Otisk, *Na cestě ke scholastice*, p. 168–69.

6 A Note to the Reader

Reconstructing Anselm's reasoning in the *Proslogion* is difficult because, like the rest of us, Anselm does not articulate his arguments step-by-step. Generally, he simply asserts a conclusion, and then states the premise or premises from which it follows. Often, but not always, he indicates some step or steps in that deduction, but he never fully articulates his arguments. That is why there is so much debate and controversy about what his argument is. Indeed, Geo Siegwart has complained:

> … the main argument of *Proslogion* II shows an opacity caused by a brute brevity, which is (at least partly) responsible for the hardly manageable magnitude of (to some extent) incompatible reconstruction proposals.[22]

For that reason, some commentators deny that Anselm has a strong sense of logical propriety.[23]

On the contrary, I judge the evidence of his logical acuity to be extraordinarily high. When I first wrote *From Belief to Understanding* I found that it is possible to reconstruct his arguments so that every line he actually wrote in his proof in the *Proslogion* appears in the reconstruction of a valid argument. Revisiting his text more than forty-five years later, my estimation of his logical acuity has only grown, for not only have I found that judgement confirmed by the arguments in the *Reply*, but I have also found repeatedly that he has refuted an objection before it has ever been made.

Because his proof of God's existence has been so badly misunderstood and is so controversial, there is only one way to demonstrate the validity of his reasoning: the intermediate steps in his arguments must be reconstructed so that it can be *seen* that his conclusions are indeed entailed by his premise(s). Inevitably, ensuring that no step is missing requires deductions which are often quite long.

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22 Geo Siegwart, 'Gaunilo parodies Anselm – An Extraordinary Job for the Interpreter', *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy*, 17 (2014), pp. 45–71, at p. 68.

23 For example, Jasper Hopkins objected to my reconstruction of Anselm's proof in *From Belief to Understanding*, describing me as being "misled by my 'dogged desire' [sic] to view Anselm as a thinker having a keen logical sense". As a result, he says, I regard him "as a better philosopher than he really is"; see Jasper Hopkins, 'On Understanding and Preunderstanding St. Anselm', *The New Scholasticism*, 52:2 (1978), pp. 243–60, at p. 259. I responded that "Perhaps Anselm was a better philosopher than we think he is" in Richard Campbell, 'On Preunderstanding St. Anselm', *The New Scholasticism* LIV,2, (1980), pp. 189–193 at p. 193.

I am well aware of the fact most people never engage in extended deductive arguments. That is not because they are deficient in rationality. Most of us, most of the time, think rationally, but we all have an intuitive sense of which inferences are valid, and which are not. From time to time, in the course of our everyday lives, we rely on our understanding of what is logical to argue the case for or against some proposition, but those arguments are usually relatively brief and easily comprehended. Only a minority of people will be familiar with long and rigorous argumentation.

I acknowledge that Anselm did not articulate his arguments fully. That is why it is not always easy to see how he deduces his conclusions from his premises. But there is a simple explanation of why Anselm does not fully spell out his reasoning. He says in the Preface of the *Monologion* that "certain brothers have persisted in urging me to write out for them a number of things I had discussed with them". He tells his readers that he wrote the *Proslogion* for a somewhat different reason:

> *Considering that what I rejoiced at having discovered would, if it were written down, be pleasing to someone or other reading it, I wrote the following work ...*

No doubt, he had his brothers in mind again. There was no need to spell out his reasoning in detail, for he was there in the monastery with his brothers, on hand to explain anything they might not understand. He was not to know that nine centuries later there would be debates about what he meant.

In the chapters which follow, I explain how each proposition follows logically from some previous propositions. Some readers might find that all too much, but there is no alternative to articulating step-by-step each of the arguments in this book, and citing the rule of inference which legitimates each step, so that readers can see for themselves exactly how a conclusion is entailed by its premises, and can thereby verify that each of my claims is justified. The claim that God exists is so momentous, and so controversial, that it could not plausibly be justified by a few short lines. But I do claim that the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof I am presenting here does *prove* that God exists.

CHAPTER 3

The Quintessential Features of Anselm's Original Proof

The reformulation of Anselm's original proof of the existence of God will deploy the phrase "something than which nothing greater could be thought" and its variants, which was the key to his proof of God's existence in *Proslogion* II and III.[1] But for the proposed reformulation of his proof to be genuinely Anselmian it will have to retain as many of the other distinctive features of his argument as possible. This indefinite description, his argumentative strategies, his innovative rule of inference, and his way of deploying such basic concepts as possibility, conceivability, and understanding can all be incorporated so that his original proof is not vulnerable to the objections of so many critics.

Two relational concepts are at the heart of Anselm's proof of the existence of God: the concept of "greater than" and the phrase "can be thought". Together, they provide the content of his descriptive phrase: "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought", and both play crucial roles at many points in his argumentation.

That indefinite description implies that there are limits to what can be thought. One might doubt whether there are any such limits, and whether much is to be gained from trying to explore them. But Anselm's great discovery is that not only does this phrase reveal profound truths about the relation of thought to reality, but exploring the implications of that indefinite description is sufficient to prove the existence of a supreme being, the God in whom he believes and whom he worships.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Anselm develops, alongside his descriptive phrase, some logical principles and rules of inference which will enable him to probe the issue of what can, and what cannot, be thought. In this

1 That phrase is standardly called in modern commentaries his "formula", for that is a convenient way of referring to that rather wordy descriptive phrase. I have chosen not to use that word because outside the sciences, its nuance is that a 'formula' is a fixed form of words which have been contrived to suit some purpose. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists one of its meanings as "a rule unintelligently or slavishly followed". Anselm's use of that phrase and its variants to express what he believes God to be is the very opposite of being an unintelligent and slavish use of a contrived form of words.

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chapter I shall explore what those concepts, principles, and rules are which will be deployed in the cosmological reformulation of his original proof.

1 The Provenance of Anselm's Indefinite Description

The explanation quoted in §2.5 which Anselm offers in *Reply* VIII of how it is possible to conceive something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought might give the impression that he has invented this concept. This famous phrase is not to be found in the Bible, nor has it been officially declared by the Church's *magisterium* to be part of orthodox Christian belief. In many modern presentations of Anselm's argument this phrase is presented without any discussion of its meaning, or how Anselm might have come by it. Often, it is called 'his formula', as if it were his own invention.

A few scholars have explored the works of earlier writers, both non-Christian and Christian, searching for a similar set of words which might have inspired Anselm to formulate this description. In this connection, Ian Logan remarks that

> Particular authority was given in the early medieval period to Augustine and Boethius, who not only exerted a profound influence on theological thought, but also provided much of the foundation for the study of the liberal arts. Like Boethius, Anselm was greatly influenced by Augustine. But he followed Boethius along a specific form of Augustinianism that gave great weight to a limited Aristotelianism based on Aristotle's logical works.[2]

Logan points out that Anselm's relation to Augustine is not straightforward, quoting Richard Southern as observing that "Anselm's greatest and most characteristic phrases can always be traced back in the direction of Augustine, but the trail disappears before it reaches him".[3]

While a number of scholars have pointed to passages in the writings of Augustine and others where God is described in similar terms, the most comprehensive survey of the antecedents to Anselm's indefinite description has

2 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion,* p. 7.

3 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion,* p. 21, citing Richard Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer*, p. 32.

been presented recently by John Demetracopoulos.[4] It is not necessary to cite all the passages he has found, but in this and the next section I shall mention some representative examples.

It seems that describing God as that than which nothing better, or greater, either exists, or can be thought, first emerged amongst a group of philosophers centred in Rome, who are generally referred to as Stoics. Founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium around 300 BC, Stoicism flourished throughout the ancient Greek and Roman world until the 3rd Century AD, when Constantine decided to favour Christianity as a better fit with the Imperial cult.

Another non-Christian thinker whose works were widely read was Marcus Tullius Cicero. He became a lawyer and philosopher who built a reputation as an orator and statesman. As a student he had studied under philosophers of a number of different schools, and his own philosophy has been described as eclectic, although in metaphysics he leaned towards Stoicism. His writings were widely circulated throughout the medieval period and their influence on the Latin language has been described as immense. The catalogue of books in the library at Bec in the 12th century included his *De natura deorum*, in which he wrote:

> Yet certainly amongst all things nothing is better than the world, nothing that is more excellent, nothing more beautiful; and not only is there nothing better, but it cannot even be thought that anything is better.[5]

Demetracopoulos suggests Anselm's indefinite description can be discerned in another passage in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, which is a report of a conversation on the topic of the gods amongst some philosophers of different schools:

> And then, Balbus, it is usual with your school to inquire from us what the life of the gods is like, and how they spend their days. In a way, you may

4 John Demetracopoulos. 'The Stoic Background to the Universality of Anselm's Definition of "God" in Proslogion 2: Boethius', *Universalitàdella Ragione. Pluralità delle Filosofie nel Medioevo*, pp. 121–138. Demetracopoulos kindly sent me translations of all the passages in this paper. His account builds on the earlier findings of Coloman Viola ('Rigine et portée de la formule dialectique du Proslogion de Saint Anselme: de l'*argument ontologique* à l'« argument mégalogique »', in *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-scolastica* 83:3 (1992), pp. 339–384) and W. Röd ('Der Gott der reinen Vernunft', in *Die Auseinandersetzung um den ontologischen Gottesbeweis von Anselm bis Hegel*.

5 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, II, 7, 18.

> be certain, which for blessedness and abundant possession of every good cannot be excelled even in imagination.[6]

Unsurprisingly, those descriptions were picked up and adopted by Christian writers, especially Augustine. There are a number of passages where Augustine describes God as "greater than all".[7] He also says, "For nothing is better than God",[8] and "He whom you fear is greater than all".[9] And he argues at length in *De libero arbitrio* that God is that "than which nothing is superior".[10] Closer to the wording Anselm adopts is what Augustine writes in his *Confessions* VII, 4,6:

> For no soul could ever, or ever would, think of something which is better than You [*potuit poteritve cogitare aliquid quod sit te melius*], who are the supreme and best good.

And in *De moribus Ecclesiae et de moribus Manichaeorum* I,11,24 Augustine describes God as

> The entirely supreme Good, than which nothing better can be thought, or understood, or believed, if we are thinking to abstain from blasphemies.

Demetracopoulos also cites several passages where Augustine extends that description to being even better than, or beyond, what can be thought. He suggests that, in all probability, some (if not all) of these Augustinian passages inspired the following statements in Boethius' famous *The Consolation of Philosophy*:

> That God, the principle of all things, is good is proven by the common conception of the minds of humans; for since nothing better than God can be conceived, who can doubt that that than which nothing is better, is good? … Therefore, that which is different in its nature from the highest good, is not itself the highest good. It would be an impious act to think that of Him than whom it is agreed nothing is more excellent.[11]

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6 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 19, 51.
7 Demetracopoulos, 'Stoic Background', pp. 121–3.
8 *De Diversis quaestionibus* LXXIII, 50.
9 *Sermo* CXXXII, 2.
10 *De libero arbitrio* II, 6, 14, 15, and 54.
11 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, III, pr. 10, §§ 7; 15.

So there seems to have been a general consensus amongst both non-Christian and Christian writers in the Graeco-Roman world to speak of God, or a god, or the gods, as better than everything else, or better than can be thought, or as most excellent, either in fact or as the most excellent which can be thought.

Logan points out that none of the similar phrases found in previous literature are *exactly* the same as Anselm's indefinite description because it contains the words "nothing greater" [*maius*], rather than "nothing better" [*melius*].[12] We have seen in §2.5, however, that in *Reply* VIII Anselm explains that the way to conceive something than which a *greater* cannot be thought is to infer it from thinking of goods which are *better* than other goods, so it seems that the distinction between "greater" and "better" is not particularly significant.

Logan points out that the person who has used a phrase closest to Anselm's is Lucius Annaeus Seneca who was a Stoic philosopher.[13] Although not a Christian, Seneca was much admired by early Christian writers.[14] In the Preface to his *Naturales Quaestiones*, Seneca asks, "What is God?", and answers, "Universal Mind". He then repeats the question, and answers

> All that you see, and all that you do not see. So precisely is His magnitude rendered thereby that nothing greater can be conceived [*qua nihil maius excogitari potest*], so that it alone is everything, its working holds together both what is outside and inside.[15]

Logan comments on this passage:

> Although there is no conclusive supporting evidence of Seneca's influence here, nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out, for of all the possible anticipations of Anselm's formula, Seneca's is the closest to Anselm's

12 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 93.

13 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 92.

14 For example, Tertullian, who was a hard-liner in opposing the Graeco-Roman philosophers, nevertheless refers to him as "our Seneca", and the convert Lactantius refers to him frequently, and always in favourable terms.

15 Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones*, I. *Praefatio* XIII. Logan cites H. Hine, who has found evidence that Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* was rediscovered in Northern France in the early 12th Century at the latest. As he says, that raises the 'tantalising possibility' that Anselm was acquainted with it. Demetracopoulos reports that two copies of Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* were extant in the library at Bec in the 12th Century.

> and it is the only one that employs the word *maius* [greater] rather than *melius* [better].[16]

What Logan does not report is the previous sentence which Seneca wrote, where he identifies God with "all you see and all that you do not see" [*Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum*].[17] As is clear from the passages quoted above, for the Stoics, God is not distinct from the Cosmos, nor from Nature, nor from Reason. For instance, in his review of the teachings of the Stoic school, Cicero quotes Chrysippus of Soli as saying that

> The world itself is a god, and also the all-pervading world-soul, and again the guiding principle of that soul, which operates in the intellect and reason, and the common and all-embracing nature of things.[18]

This view is certainly at odds with the Christian doctrine of God as the Creator of the world. Nevertheless, Demetracopoulos infers from all these references in both Christian and non-Christian sources that this Stoic conception of God as the greatest, and the greatest conceivable being, was accepted as applicable universally to any god, and was congenial to the developing tradition of Christian philosophical theology.

Anselm expresses that conception in as minimal and non-question-begging way as possible, by formulating is as "something than which nothing greater could be thought". He then deploys the descriptive phrase "than which a greater cannot be thought" throughout the *Proslogion* from Chapter V onwards. His usage of these phrases it will be respected in all three stages of the cosmological reformulation of his proof I am about to present.

2 The Universality of Anselm's Indefinite Description

The passage which Demetracopoulos emphasizes as the most relevant to Anselm's indefinite description is one which has hitherto passed unnoticed (probably because it does not form part of a treatise of philosophical theology). It occurs in Boethius' *Second Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*.

16 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 92–93.

17 It is intriguing that the Nicene Creed describes God as "the maker of all thing visible and invisible", which seems to echo Seneca's phrase. Perhaps the Nicene Fathers chose that wording deliberately to differentiate their God from the Stoic conception of God.

18 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I.15.

Boethius is there engaging with a dispute about the interpretation of a sentence Aristotle had written in the first section of *De Interpretatione*.

Aristotle had said that words, whether spoken or written, are symbols of "experiences in the soul" [Greek: *pathēmata tēs psychēs*; Latin: *passiones animae*]. But, he says, while the words spoken or written are not the same for all people, "the experiences of which they are direct signs, are the same for everyone". The Stoic philosopher Aspasius, who had written several commentaries on the works of Aristotle, had wondered how it is possible that the experiences of the soul are the same for all when there is such a diversity of opinions on the just and the good. Boethius criticizes Aspasius's comment, arguing that Aristotle's claim does not apply only to sensory experience, but also to conceptions of what is good and just, writing:

> All just and good things are judged as such either according to convention or according to nature. And, if one speaks of just and good with reference to the 'civil law' and 'civil injustice', it is true that "the experiences of the soul" are not "the same", because 'civil law' and 'the public good' stand by convention, not by nature. In contrast, natural good and law "are the same for all peoples". This is the case with 'God', too; whereas the various cultures differ from each other, nevertheless a certain thing of a supremely eminent nature is "understood" to be "the same".[19]

The relevant point here is that Boethius applies to the case of God what he says about 'the civil law' and 'the public good'. While the latter are matters of convention, according to him, the 'natural good and law' are the same for all peoples. Boethius is saying that likewise in the case of God, while God is understood differently in different cultures, all peoples understand the *same* thing to have a supremely eminent nature.

Demetracopoulos asks, "Did Anselm pay any attention to this passage?" He points to a passage in *Monologion* x, where Anselm distinguishes three different ways in which people use the language of their own race to refer to a thing [*res*]. In the *first* way a thing is referred to by using 'sensible signs', that is, signs which are perceptible by the bodily senses. In this way, he says, "*I speak of a man when I signify him by the name 'man'*". In the *second* way a thing is referred to by inwardly speaking in our minds these same signs by imagining them or by understanding them by reason according to the diversity of the things themselves. He says, "*I think this name silently*".

19 Boethius, *Second Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, at 16a6–7, quoted in John Demetracopoulos, 'The Stoic Background', p. 128.

In a third way, Anselm says, I refer to a man

> *when my mind beholds him either by means of an image of his body or by means of a definition – by means of an image of his body, for instance, when my mind imagines his visible shape; by means of a definition, for instance, when it conceives his universal being: namely, rational mortal animal.*

Anselm deems the third sort of signs as superior to the rest, because these signs are "*natural and the same for all peoples*".

Two features of this passage are noteworthy. Firstly, Anselm's reference to the natural character of the third class of 'signs' is a clear citation from Boethius' translation of the passage in Aristotle's *De interpretatione* 1, cited above. As Demetracopoulos comments, it is obvious that when Anselm writes that this third kind of speaking involves words which are "*natural and the same for all peoples*" he is echoing the words which Boethius has written. Secondly, since Anselm agrees with Boethius that words such as "good" and "just" are 'natural' and 'the same for all peoples', it seems that he would also agree with Boethius that that is also true of the word "God".

Demetracopoulos also points out that when Boethius writes that paragraph, he is endorsing a passage which Augustine wrote in his *De Doctrina Christiana*:

> For when the one supreme God of gods is thought of, even by those who believe that there are other gods, and call them by that name and worship them as gods, whether in heaven or on earth, they are thinking of something than which nothing is better and indeed is the most exalted that thought is trying to reach.... Yet all strive zealously to exalt the excellence of God, nor can anyone be found who believes that something better is God. So all agree that they value this God above all those other things.[20]

Here Augustine is inferring from the fact that 'the one supreme God of gods is thought of' that nothing better or more exalted than God can be thought. But what is most notable is that Augustine is claiming that all those who believe in and worship some god – indeed any god or gods – are all striving to reach the same exalted being, described in language similar to Anselm's phrase.

Demetracopoulos comments that

> Both in Cicero's and Augustine's writing, 'eternal law' is identified with God; likewise, Boethius produces the example of 'God' immediately after

20 Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1,7,7, 1–13.

> the example of 'natural law'. Boethius, therefore, standing obviously on Stoic grounds, and intending to defeat Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle's *intellectus*, found it just as natural to add the example of 'God'. God was identified by the Stoics with the 'natural law' he had just referred to; thus, it was quite normal for him to adjunct this example to the previous one.[21]

It is evident that Anselm was familiar with the works of these earlier writers, and had them in mind when he formulated the phrase "something than which nothing greater could be thought". While the passages cited express much the same idea in their different ways, none of them are exactly the same as Anselm's indefinite description. Seneca's claim, "nothing greater can be found out by thinking" is the closest. But whereas Seneca ascribed that description uniquely to God, Anselm introduces an *indefinite* description – "*something* than which nothing greater could be thought" – and is careful to avoid presupposing that it applies uniquely to God until Stage Three, where he invokes an independent premise to argue that this indefinite description is true only of the God to whom he is praying.

Although Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm each hold that the concept of a supreme being is universal, they acknowledge that it is elaborated in different ways in different religions and cultures. That is not inconsistent. It is possible to maintain that, properly understood, a thing is such-and-such, but allow that others might describe it differently, indeed, so differently that their 'understanding' is a mis-understanding. Demetracopoulos summarizes the findings of his research as follows:

> To put it as clearly as possible, Anselm was convinced that, in contrast with his argument as a whole, his definition of God in *Proslogion*, ch. 2 was not actually "his". And he was perfectly happy about this. For, to him, the force of this definition consisted exactly in its being absolutely unoriginal and, therefore, universally accepted – so much so that it could easily be subscribed to, even by an atheist, that is even by someone who would look indifferently upon the religiously-committed persons and realise that any such person would, if asked, naturally define the object of his cult in these terms.[22]

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21 Demetracopoulos, 'Stoic Background', p. 133.

22 He notes that the necessity as well as the universality of some sort of belief in God is also stated in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, II, 2, 5–6.

> In other words, Anselm, in using this definition as the starting-point of his argument, subscribed to Boethius' Neoplatonic-Stoic reading of Aristotle's *intellectus*/*nomata*[23] as concepts and notions shared by nature by all the members of *omnes gentes* [all peoples], either literate or illiterate, belonging either to this or that religion, living in any time, past, present or future, regardless of one's accepting the content of the concept of "God" as corresponding to an extra-mental reality or not.[24]

Apart from misdescribing Anselm's indefinite description as a 'definition', this is both sound and illuminating.[25]

When Anselm comes to articulate his proof of the existence of God in the *Proslogion* he adopts this concept of a supreme being, but describes it in the least committal way as possible, as "*something* than which nothing greater could be thought". His first task is to establish whether there is such a most eminent nature in reality. He then moves on to argue that only the God to whom he is praying is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and truly exists.

What this examination of previous writers has shown is that, when Anselm writes the sentence (B) in *Proslogion* II – "And indeed we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought" – he is not introducing a

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23 Demetracopoulos quotes Richard Sorabji (*The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD. A Sourcebook. Vol. 3. Logic and Metaphysics*, p. 206), as arguing that Boethius' refutation of Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle's *intellectus* "seems to come from Porphyry". He adds, "One might notice in this context the Stoic affinities of Porphyry's distinction between 'divine law' and 'positive law', whose features coincide almost fully and literally with those presented by Boethius" in the passage quoted above.

24 Demetracopoulos 'Stoic Background', pp. 133–4. He notes that this is contrary, e. g., to the statement of P. Gilbert, that "la dénomination anselmienne de Dieu [...] est en réalité une création anselmienne"; P. Gilbert, *Le* "Proslogion" *de S. Anselme: Silence de Dieu et joie de l'homme*, p. 97.

25 When I wrote to John Demetracopoulos objecting to his use of the word "definition" in this passage, he replied that he is *not* assuming, as so many do, that Anselm offers his indefinite description as a *definition* of God. For he replied to me that:

> Does [Anselm] say or imply that this is a definition? To me, he does not. This is not a definition of a thing, but a mental concept, i.e. what Aristotle calls *noema* (Boethius: *intellectus*), which is conventionally connected to a verbal sign. It is in this sense that I say in my article that this is a definition of the word 'God', i.e. a description of the content that arises in one's mind upon hearing this word (regardless of the language he uses and his cultural environment). That's why I have written 'God' (not God).

Given that explanation, I believe that he intended to insert inverted commas around the word, "God" also in the first paragraph quoted, and I accept that he is not misinterpreting Anselm's belief as a definition of *God*, as so many do.

clever formula he has devised for the purposes of proving that God exists. He is saying that "we Christians" believe that "our" God is that supreme being to which *all peoples* are referring in their different ways. While he formulates that description in his own distinctive way, he is referring to 'the God of gods' to which Augustine has referred, the God who, according to Boethius, is the same for all peoples.

The first objective of the three-stage argument which Anselm presents across *Proslogion* II and III is to prove that the God in whom he and all Christians believe – the God who is authoritatively described in the Nicene Creed – is that supreme being who is above and beyond all religions and all cultures. The first objective of the cosmological reformulation of his proof will likewise be to prove that identity.

3 A Definition of "greater than"

It is remarkable that, amidst all the speculations and debates about whether Anselm's inference, "which is greater", quoted in §1.6.1 is legitimate, few commentators have thought to ask the fundamental question: What does Anselm mean by 'greater than'? The commentators have been so focussed on what is so 'great-making' about being in reality that they do not ask: What does it *mean* for something to be 'greater than' something else?

I know of only one contribution which addresses this fundamental question. A few commentators have presented reconstructions of Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II which define "greater than" in terms of the very inference Anselm is making, but such definitions do not explain *why* something is 'greater than' another. The definition of 'greater than' proposed in 2015 by Günter Eder and Esther Ramharter, however, is explanatory. When I first read their article, their definition of "greater than" struck me as a revelation. Because that definition stipulates the conditions for anything x to be greater than anything y, it *explains* in a way which is quite general, *why* x is greater than y.

That definition renders the logic of Anselm's reasoning so straightforward and transparent in a way that no other commentators, to my knowledge, ever had. However, I judged that if their definition is to be faithful to Anselm's own explanation in *Reply* VIII of how it is possible to conceive something than which nothing greater could be thought it needed to be amended. Since the *Monologion* and the *Reply* VIII passages discussed in §2.5 show that Anselm understands being greater as being *better*, the properties which figure in applications of the definition of "greater than" must also be good. Nevertheless, I commend Eder and Ramharter for making a major contribution to Anselmian

studies, for their proposal throws light on one of the obscurities in Anselm's proof which has generated so much fruitless discussion and controversy.

In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I enthusiastically adopted Eder and Ramharter's definition of "greater than" after I had amended it along these lines, as well as their definition of 'Quasi-Identity', which I renamed "Essential Identity" because the word "quasi" often has a pejorative nuance. However, using both those definitions made the reconstruction of both Stages One and Two of his proof very long and complicated. So, in this book I have decided to express various comparisons using counterfactual conditional propositions, which is what Anselm himself does in the *Reply*.

Furthermore, Eder and Ramharter formulate their definitions in terms of properties. Many modern philosophers object, reasonably enough, that what does not exist does not have *any* properties. But, of course, we can, and do, refer to what does not exist: both the things which once existed, but do not exist now, such as my father, and to pure figments of imagination, such as the flying horse of ancient Greek mythology, Pegasus. And we can, and do, describe such things and evaluate them in the light of those descriptions. To avoid the whole issue of whether non-existent things have any properties, I have chosen to reformulate the definition of "greater than" in terms of predicates, rather than properties.

One advantage of expressing this definition in terms of predicates is that it becomes easy to incorporate Kant's dictum that "exists" is not a 'real predicate'. Many commentators invoke that dictum as supporting the prosecution's case against Anselm's argument. But that is a fundamental mistake; what Kant's dictum means is often misunderstood. He is not saying that "exists" is not a *genuine* predicate. Nor is he saying that "exists" is not *logically* a predicate. On the contrary, he says quite explicitly that "exists" *is*, logically, a predicate. His point is that "exists" is a predicate of a *different kind* from those predicates which describe the properties which determine *what* a thing [a *res*] is. For, as he says,

> Though, in my concept, nothing may be lacking in the possible real content of a thing in general, something is lacking in its relation to my whole state of thought.... Through its existence [an object] is thought as belonging to the context of experience as a whole. In being thus connected with the content of experience as a whole, the concept of the object is not, however, in the least enlarged.[26]

26 *Critique of Pure Reason*, A600/B628.

I have always cited Kant as a witness for the defence of Anselm's argument. For, what he means by his dictum that "Being is not a real predicate" is that "exists" is not the kind of predicate which determines what a thing, a *res*, is. Otherwise, he argues, if a statement asserting that something exists is true, what exists would not be the same as what is said to exist. Whether a thing exists, or not, makes no difference to *what* the thing itself is. The reason he gives as to why the subject of an existential judgement is not in the least *enlarged* by its being said to exist is because "exists" is not what he calls "a *determining* predicate". So, it becomes possible, without contradiction, to compare any existing thing with how it is at some other time when it does not exist, and *vice versa*. In both hypothetical situations, it remains the same thing. Whether it exists or not makes no difference to *what* it is.

That is precisely what the logic of Anselm's Stage One argument requires: that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought must be *the very same thing* whether it is in reality or not. Otherwise *it* could not be greater if *it* were in reality. Incorporating that consideration into the definition of "greater than" not only incorporates Kant's dictum, but it also clarifies *why* being in reality is greater than not. Accordingly, I now propose to define "greater than" by also incorporating within it Kant's terminology of a "determining predicate". For it is critical to the validity of Anselm's inference in *Proslogion* II that "is in reality" not be a determining predicate. My amended definition of "greater than" is:

> Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x*, and some positive, primitive, predicate *F*, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y*.

This definition is a more radical amendment of Eder and Ramharter's definition than the one I proposed in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. Incorporating Kant's terminology of a "determining predicate" dispenses with the need to complement it with their second definition of 'Quasi-Identity'.

The first condition in that amended definition has two functions. It ensures that *x* and *y* are described as things of the same sort. Since both are described by the same mutually realizable predicates which determine what they are, they are comparable. In Eder and Ramharter's definition, that same requirement is obtained by stipulating that *y* has all the essential properties which *x* has. That condition is not required in my formulation, for it does not ascribe any properties to anything which might not exist; indeed, it says that what is said not to exist *lacks* a positive primitive predicate which is true of anything which exists.

This first condition also ensures that there is no other respect in which *y* is better than *x*. For if *x* is to be greater than *y*, it should not be the case that *y* is described in a way which implies that *y* is better than *x* in some respect while *x* is better than *y* in some other respect.

I have also included the reference to a 'mutually realizable set of predicates' in this first condition in the light of one of Kant's objections to what he called 'the ontological argument'. The targets of Kant's objections were the Cartesian and Leibnizian arguments for the existence of God in which the *ens realissimum* [the most real being] is described as having a *consistent* set of perfections. Kant argued that a set of perfections might be logically possible in the sense that it contains no contradictions, but the set of perfections might not be a 'real possibility' because they might not all be *mutually realizable*. Although Anselm's argument is very different from those Cartesian and Leibnizian arguments, requiring that the predicates which describe *x* and *y* are mutually realizable ensures that any instantiation of that definition must be a real possibility.

To require a mutually realizable set of predicates is a stronger condition than consistency, but it is required if the definition of "greater than" is to be quite general. Even Anselm struggled in *Proslogion* IX to XI to reconcile God's justice with His mercy. Arguably, Anselm did not solve the issue of how God could be both just and merciful until he wrote the *Cur Deus Homo*. He argued there that the deficiency caused by the sinful actions of humans had to be made good by humans, but if we all behaved as we ought, that would not be sufficient to make good the deficiency, since doing what we ought is what is required of us anyway. I submit that Anselm's argument in the *Cur Deus Homo* is that this problem could not be solved by any theoretical considerations; it could be solved only by God's action of taking upon Himself the obligation – the *debitum* – which only a human could discharge. I shall return to this issue in the following section.

Since in Stage One in *Proslogion* II, Anselm is comparing something *with itself* in two different circumstances – being in the understanding alone, and being also in reality – it must remain what it is. Its identity – *what* it is – is not determined by whether it is in reality or not. So, the first condition is trivially satisfied.

The second condition in that definition of "greater than" stipulates that *x* is greater than *y* because in at least one respect *x* is *better* than *y*. That is in accord with what Anselm says in the *Reply* VIII passage discussed in §2.5. It is essential that the predicate in virtue of which *x* is better than *y* is not a *determining* predicate, otherwise *x* and *y* would not be entities of the same sort, and therefore not comparable. For if the respect in virtue of which *x* is better than *y* were a determination, it would not be the same in the two circumstances

compared. In that case, it would not be possible to apply this definition in the case Anselm describes in *Proslogion* II. For in the case he considers, the *same* thing which is supposed to be only in the understanding can be thought to be in reality, "which is greater".

We saw in §2.5 that Anselm then suggests that something which has a beginning, but not an end, is much better than something which has both a beginning and an end. Why should that be so? Because there are two periods when the former does not exist, whereas the latter has only one such period. And when he says that something which does not have an end or a beginning is even better than the latter, "even if it should pass from the past through the present into the future", that is because there is *no* period when that which is extended for ever does not exist. Clearly, in each of these comparisons, he is saying that the reason why to be everlasting is better than to have a beginning, but then never cease existing, is because it is better to exist than not to exist.

Sigbjorn Sonnesyn has drawn my attention to the fact that, in the historical context in which Anselm was writing, that it is better to exist than not to exist would have seemed obvious. He has commented that:

> There was a long tradition, both within Platonic thought and the Aristotelian counterpart, to regard 'good' and 'being' as convertible, that is, that while they are conceptually different, they nevertheless ultimately point to the very same entity.[27]

For example, in his *De doctrina Christiana* I. 75 Augustine says that we humans, created by the God who is supreme being [*esse*] and supreme goodness, are good to the extent that we exist, and that we exist less if we are evil. And later on Thomas Aquinas developed this idea, arguing that being and goodness are convertible as they are in themselves, while being is the first concept to be formed by human understanding, and so goodness or being good are second-order concepts from the point of view of human inquiry.

So, for Anselm, it was obvious that something which always existed would be better than something which has either a beginning or an end. In the *Reply* VIII passage he adds, as the apex of his hierarchy, that "*And whether or not something of this kind is in reality, that which in no way is in need, nor is thought to be changed or to be moved, is very much better than it*". So the ascent in thinking has thought of a thing which is not in need of anything, and is so powerful that no force could change or move it. Since that is how it is possible to come to

27 Personal email, 28 November 2020.

think of something than which nothing greater could be thought, It is implicit in this mental ascent that:

Ceteris paribus, to exist is good.

This implicit premise cannot be simply dismissed as one of the peculiarities of an outdated metaphysics. For I submit that there is virtually universal agreement amongst all peoples, in all cultures, that in general to exist is good. That agreement is evident in the joy people express at the birth of a baby, the grief they express when someone dies, the universal condemnation of murder as a crime, the desire to preserve wilderness, the reaction of horror at wanton destruction, the desire to preserve something which is precious, and many, many other everyday judgements. No special claims are being made here about existing, other than it is good.

Because this premise ascribes being good to existing, being good can be called a second-order property. For that reason, this premise is not saying that every existing thing is good. When some specific case is under consideration, this principle has to be weighed against other relevant circumstances. That is the force of the qualification, *ceteris paribus* [all other things being equal]. For example, the fact that we humans kill plants and animals for food is not evidence that the principle is false. Rather, it is evidence that we take the goodness of being able to eat food in order to stay alive to outweigh the badness of extinguishing the life of the plants and animals we eat. The same applies to saying of some really bad people that it would have been better had they never been born. For it is not being said that such bad people would have been *better people* if they had not been born, but rather that the world would have been a better place if they had never existed.

Eder and Ramharter's definition is the only contribution I know which comes even close to explaining satisfactorily *why* Anselm claims that being in reality is greater than being only in the understanding. I submit that with the amendments I have proposed, together with the complementary premise, "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good", this amended definition of "greater than" has a number of advantages over all other proposals which purport to address this issue:

(a) The additional premise, "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good" is simple and plausible, and merely articulates a feature already implicit in Anselm's concept of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.
(b) It enables a plausible clarification of what Anselm was meaning when he wrote the comment, "which is greater" in Stage One,

and "which is greater than what can be thought not to exist" in Stage Two;

(c) It is appropriate to the case in Stage One where Anselm is comparing how that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be if it were only in the understanding with how that same thing would be if it were in reality, as can be thought. And it is appropriate to the cases in Stages Two and Three where he compares something which *cannot* be thought not to exist with what *can* be thought not to exist.

(d) Its formulation renders it transparently clear and plausible *why* Anselm should have asserted in *Proslogion* II that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be greater if it were to be in reality than if it were to be only in the understanding, and in *Proslogion* III *why* it would be greater if it could not be thought not to exist than what can be thought not to exist;

(e) It is a quite *general* definition which enables a comparison in two cases of quite different kinds: comparing something with how *it itself* would be in two different but conceivable situations, and comparing two different things;

(f) It renders unnecessary all those proposed premises asserting that in Stage One existing is a 'perfection', or a 'great-making' property, however that is expressed, and the doubly universal premise, "Whatever could not be thought not to exist is greater than whatever can be thought not to exist", which some commentators read into Anselm's Stage Two argument as an alleged 'background premise' even though it is not in the text and is so *ad hoc* that it begs the question, and is therefore invalid.

This definition and the complementary premise '*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good' not only render Anselm's reasoning in *Proslogion* II and III perspicuous, but they will also will be crucial to reformulating Anselm's proof as a three-stage cosmological argument.

4 That It Is Possible That Something Is Such That a Greater Cannot Be Thought

At the end of their discussion of Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II, Sandra Visser & Thomas Williams observe that "He does not have an adequate

argument for the claim that God is a possible being".[28] They allege that his argument is vulnerable precisely at its concluding point.

They observe that Anselm ascribes to God various traditional attributes later in the *Proslogion*, on the basis that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be. Anselm then tries to resolve several apparent contradictions and conceptual puzzles generated by his doing so. Visser and William's point is that resolving *some* of these putative contradictions does not suffice to remove the very real possibility that *other* contradictions might arise, even if they have yet to be identified. So, they claim that his argument is at risk that some unresolvable contradiction might arise which would refute his argument, for Anselm has failed to show that there is *no* possibility of any other contradictions arising.

This allegation shows that Visser and Williams are assuming that Anselm's proof is like all those Cartesian arguments which purport to deduce the existence of God from describing a perfect being as having a set of perfections. For instance, Descartes reports that he found within himself the idea of a God, or a supremely perfect being. He says:

> His idea is one I find within me just as surely as the idea of a shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is not less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature.[29]

As noted in §3.3, Leibniz objected that Descartes must first show that the set of properties attributed to this perfect being must be free from contradiction, and sought to rectify that omission. Kant agreed with Leibniz's criticism of Descartes' argument, but objected further that being logically consistent is *not enough* to ensure that such a being is a 'real' possibility. He insisted that all those properties must not only be logically consistent, but they must also be mutually compatible, that is, it must be possible that they all could be realized at the same time without conflicting.

Some commentators – such as Richard La Croix, Jasper Hopkins, and Ian Logan – insist that Anselm cannot establish that the God in whom he believes exists until *after* he has established that something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought has *all* the same attributes as the God in whom he believes. If that were so, Anselm's proof would indeed be vulnerable in just the way that Visser and Williams allege. But the argumentative strategy which Anselm executed in the *Proslogion* is very different from all the Cartesian arguments precisely with respect to the point Visser and Williams have raised. He

28 Sandra Visser & Thomas Williams, *Anselm*, p. 92.

29 Descartes, *Meditation* v.

does *not* rest his proof on first establishing that God has all the perfections, and then inferring that He exists.

The genius of the argumentative strategy of the *Proslogion* – and its major difference from the *Monologion* – is that Anselm realized that he does not need to establish that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought has *all* the same attributes as the God in whom he believes. As I pointed that out in §1.6.2, he has recognized that it is enough to establish that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought has a property which nothing other than God has. It is enough to prove the conclusion of Stage Two:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.*

Once Anselm has established that the God whom he is addressing is identical with that thing, he can then use that identity to build on it all the other attributes which he had said that his *unum argumentum* would suffice to establish. Anselm's proof proceeds in the opposite order to the Cartesian and Leibnizian arguments. Visser and Williams' allegation that Anselm's argument is vulnerable to this flaw in the Cartesian arguments is misconceived.

Although that settles that spurious issue, there is, however, one serious question which needs to be addressed concerning whether it is *possible* that something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought exists, although it is not the issue raised by Visser and Williams. Anselm's descriptive phrase presupposes that *something*, which is otherwise indeterminate, is such that it is not possible that something greater can be thought. If Anselm's argument is to get off the ground, it must at least be possible that something with that nature exists. That is, for it to be possible that such a thing exists, it must be *false* that necessarily, for everything, a greater thing can be thought.

In saying that I am not saying that it has to be false that it is necessary that, for every *existing* being, a greater being can be thought. That would be quite unreasonable, for it would be requiring that the conclusion in Stage One be true before the argument to demonstrate that it is true could even be formulated. Rather, the point is that Anselm's indefinite description presupposes that it is not possible that for anything which can be thought, something greater can also be thought. For, if that were possible, it would not be possible that *anything* could satisfy Anselm's indefinite description. In that case, the series of things which can be thought to be greater than something else would be endless, with no maximum.

When we contemplate that alternative, it is not difficult to conjure up a series in which each member has a successor which is greater than it, *ad infinitum*. We are all familiar with such a series; the series of natural numbers is such

that each number has a successor of greater numerical value, and that series has no upper bound. For any number, a larger number can be thought.

However, it has already been shown in §2.5 that Anselm has explained in *Reply* VIII that the series of goods which are better than other goods is not infinitely extendible. To repeat, thinking of something which begins to exist but subsequently never ceases to exist is thinking of something which is better that all those things in the universe which have a beginning and an end. And thinking of something which neither begins to exist nor ceases to exist is thinking of something which is even better. Then, in *Reply* I he has argued that:

> *Therefore, in no way does it* [i.e., something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *not exist as a totality* [totum] *somewhere and at some time, but it exists always and everywhere as a totality* [totum].

How could it be thought that anything exists which is better than that?

Secondly, while the word "good" is not necessarily a *moral* term, it is certainly a *normative* term. As Anselm says in *Monologion* I:

> *Ordinarily nothing is considered good except because of a certain usefulness* (*e.g., health and whatever conduces to health are called good*) *or because of some kind of excellence* (*e.g. beauty and whatever conduces to beauty are considered good*).

So, to be better is to be more useful or more excellent. So, when Anselm infers that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be 'greater' if it were to be in reality than if it were not, he is not basing that inference on a claim that the concept of an existing *x* is different from the concept of an *x*. He is basing it on the different *valuations* properly ascribable to the thing itself, depending on whether it exists or not. That observation takes us into normative territory. The norms, in comparison with which things are valued, are maxima. One does not have adopt the whole of Plato's metaphysics to acknowledge that nothing could be better than that which is entirely good.

So, if it is not possible to think of something better than something which exists always and everywhere as a totality, it is false that necessarily, for everything, a greater thing can be thought. That answers the question above. For it shows that something is such that it is not possible that something greater can be thought. While that possibility does not entail, by itself, that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists, that it is *possible* that something of such a nature exists will provide a significant step in the

reformulated Stage One presented in Chapter 4. For in §4.8 the following conceptual truth will be invoked:

(1) It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

It is noteworthy that this explanation of how it is possible that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists follows from that fact that some things are better than others. Anselm's indefinite description is not just a fiction he thought up one night in chapel. Although it is his way of formulating a conception of a supreme being which had been acknowledged by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers for centuries, it is grounded in the ordinary judgements we make most days about which of two things is the better. Anyone who understands that can, with a little thought, understand what it would be for something to exist which is such that nothing greater could be thought.

5 Justifying Anselm's Introduction of That-Than-Which-a-Greater-Cannot-Be-Thought

It was noted in §1.6.1 that Stage One of Anselm's proof is in two parts. The first half of *Proslogion* II is designed to establish that even the Fool is bound to concede that "*Something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is at least in the understanding*". The next sentence Anselm writes is:

(C) *And certainly that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be solely in the understanding*.

This sentence is quite startling, for it seems to come out of nowhere. It sounds like a dogmatic assertion about a particular thing of which previously there has been no mention. It has one tenuous connection with what has gone before – the phrase 'in the understanding' – but now that predicate is qualified by "solely".

Moreover, not only has Anselm introduced the singular term "that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" but he has altered his indefinite description from "… *nothing-greater-can*-be-thought" to "… *a-greater-cannot*-be-thought". In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I surmised that that alteration is deliberate, because he was aware that he could not assume that any particular

thing is in the understanding on the basis of what the Fool is bound to concede.[30] For, as noted in §1.6.1, it would be invalid to assume, based on what is in the Fool's understanding, that any particular thing is something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. The Fool need not be thinking of anything in particular.

So how does Anselm justify his introducing in (C) the singular term, "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought"? To answer that, we have to recall the little scenario he sketched before beginning his argument. It was noted in Chapter 1 that Anselm has imagined that he has said aloud that:

(B) *And indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

But his prayer is disrupted by his remembering that the Fool mentioned in the Psalms has said in his heart, "*There is not a god*".

Anselm cannot continue with his prayer, because if the Fool's denial is correct, it would be pointless to continue praying. He can only resume his prayer once he has confronted and dealt with this profoundly troubling challenge. But how to address such a challenge? As we saw, he cannot sensibly ask God, "Do You exist?", nor ask, "Are You something than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought?". Somehow, he must transform that question into one he can sensibly ask. How he validly deduces a supposition which he can test for truth can be reconstructed as follows.

I surmise that Anselm considers what would follow if *both* the belief he declared by uttering (B) and the Fool's denial are true. Supposing that both are true produces the following conjunction:

(2) We believe You to be something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought, but there is not a god.

Given that when Anselm says "You" he is presupposing that he is addressing the one and only God, it follows from the two clauses in (2), by *modus tollens*, that:

(3) There does not exist something than which nothing greater could be thought.

30 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 290.

But before Anselm begins the argument which will establish that (3) is false, he transforms both its subject and its predicate. His first step is to express what is implied by his use of the verb "could" by transforming (3) into the following proposition:

(4) There does not exist something which is such that it is not possible that it *can* be thought that something is greater than it.

That is equivalent to:

(5) There does not exist something which is such that it is *necessary* that it cannot be thought that something is greater than it.

In turn, (5) is equivalent to:

(6) *Anything* which *necessarily* is such that a greater cannot be thought does not exist.

However, describing anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought as *necessarily* so described is too strong – much stronger than he needs. Since it is a recognized logical truth that "It is necessary that *p*" implies "*p*", Anselm infers from (6) that:

(7) Anything which is such that a greater cannot be thought does not exist.

So now Anselm has validly derived a question which he can sensibly ask. Since he has inferred (7), in the text of *Proslogion* II he turns that consequence into a question:

Is there not anything *of such a nature?*

It has now been shown how he has derived that question.

For years I have wondered why Anselm poses this question in negative terms. For he is not asking whether there *is* such a nature, but whether there is *not* such a nature. Because he is intent on proving that God exists, most readers, including myself until recently, misread him as asking, "Is there anything of such a nature?", and interpret his conclusion as answering "Yes!". But that is *not* the question Anselm asks; the question he has actually written contains the word "not". That negative question is precisely what validly follows from his

own belief and the Fool's denial. His posing the question in the negative shows how seriously he takes the Fool's challenge to his own faith, and how rigorously he is thinking of a way to respond to that challenge. That negative question is exactly the right question for him to ask.

Of course, if he were to succeed in proving that there does exist something of such a nature, that would establish that (7) is false. But proving that (7) is false would not necessarily prove that the God to whom he is praying exists, for it would still be possible that something of that nature exists, but it is not the God in whom 'we believe'. But at least it would admit the possibility that 'our' God exists.

To test that there is not anything with such a nature Anselm makes yet another inference. The question which Anselm has asked himself demands a "Yes" or "No" answer. To ensure that the issue to be settled can only be settled by establishing which of those two alternatives is true, he transforms (7) yet further.

He needs to do that because he is aware that the verb "*esse*" is ambiguous. In the Latin spoken at his time, that verb is regularly used to express *two* different conceptions of existence. It can be used to mean that something exists, as opposed to its being non-existent, that is, a fiction. In that sense, something either exists, or it does not, and there is no third alternative. In this sense, nothing exists more or less truly than anything else. That is what some scholars appropriately call "the *binary* conception of existence". It is in this sense that the Fool has said in his heart: "There is not a god". The Fool's denial has raised that threshold question, and if he is right, Anselm has nothing more to say.

But Anselm has another conception of existence. Because of when and where he lived, Anselm is an inheritor of the Augustinian intellectual tradition, which was in turn much influenced by Plato's philosophy. So, he is aware that people also commonly use the verb "exists" [*esse*] in such a way that some things are said to exist more truly than others. This conception of existence admits of degrees of existing, which is different from the way in which nowadays we mostly think that things either exist, or they do not. In this way of thinking, once the threshold question about something is answered in the affirmative, a further question arises: how truly does that thing exist? We will see that this Augustinian conception of existence is in play in *Proslogion* III, and I will discuss these two conceptions of existence further in Chapter 12.

The threshold question – "*Is there not* anything *of such a nature*?" – must be settled before the question of how truly it does exist can even be raised.

Because Anselm is such a careful thinker, he recognizes that he needs to make it clear that the question concerns existing in a binary sense. So, Anselm makes a further change to (7) in order to disambiguate the use of the verb "*esse*". So, he replaces the verb "*est*" ["exists"] in (7) with a verbal phrase which expresses the binary conception of existence. Clearly, he is implicitly invoking a logical principle of broad generality:

(8) Whatever does not exist is not in reality.

So, instead of saying (7) – that anything which is such that a greater cannot be thought *does not exist* – he infers from (7) and (8), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(9) Anything which is such that a greater cannot be thought *is not in reality*.

In order to determine whether that universal proposition (9) is true, Anselm instantiates it. For if (9) were true, it follows that *that* which Anselm believes God to be would not be in reality. Accordingly, Anselm instantiates (9) by introducing an arbitrarily selected representative of anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, validly deducing:

(10) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality.

Of course, Anselm still *believes* that God exists, and he still *believes* that there exists something with such a nature, although he does not yet understand whether those two beliefs are true. His strategy is to suppose that (10) is true and see what follows. That sets the task for Stage One of his argument: to determine whether (10) is true. That is what *Proslogion* II is all about – *not* whether God exists, nor whether a god exists – but whether something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality. That is exactly what the text of *Proslogion* II says.

Some readers might interpret the deduction of (10) as inconsistent with what I have argued so vigorously in §1.4: that Anselm's initial belief is not the first premise of his argument; and that it cannot validly be inferred from anything in *Proslogion* II that God exists. For it might be objected: this reconstruction begins by supposing that Anselm assumed that his initial belief is true. Does not his showing at the end of *Proslogion* II that (10) is false amount to proving that God is in reality?

The answer is: No! For it cannot validly be inferred immediately from showing that (10) is false that God is in reality. What Anselm can say after he has proven that (10) is false is:

(11) It is not possible both that You are something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought, and that there is not a god.

That is equivalent to:

(12) It is necessary that *either* You are not something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought, *or* a god does exist, *or* both.

Since at this stage Anselm does not know whether his belief is true, it remains an open question as to which of those three alternatives is true. That is why Anselm has no option but to pursue a three-stage strategy if he wants to prove that God exists, as we saw in §1.6.

6 Being Possible

The verb "can" [*potest*] is part of Anselm's phrase, "can be thought". It looms large in his text. His usage of it warrants examination on its own.

There is an interesting difference between Anselm's Latin and our modern English. Anselm often describes things using the phrases "*quod potest esse*" and "*quod potest non esse*". There are three ways of translating the Latin verb, "*potest*" into English: as "is possible"; as "is able"; and as "can". So, the Latin phrase "*quod potest esse*" can be translated either as "what possibly exists"' or as "what is able to exist", or as "what can exist". The second Latin phrase, "*quod potest non esse*", can be translated similarly but in the negative. None of those three ways of translating "*potest*" is wrong, but none is wholly satisfactory. Let me comment on each in turn.

Firstly, to translate "*potest*" *as* "is possible" has at times an inappropriate nuance. The English word, "possible" is derived etymologically from the Latin "*possit*", which is the subjunctive mood of the verb "*potest*"; "*possit*" means "could". But both in common usage, and in its use by philosophers, that English word omits much of the richness of that Latin verb. Most philosophers in the modern period understand possibilities simply in terms of what is *logically* possible, in the sense of not being self-contradictory. Anselm certainly says that contradictions 'cannot be', but in his usage, what is not *logically* possible is the outer limit of what *is able* to be. In this, he is simply following the

Aristotelian tradition which he inherited via the works of Boethius, as was noted in §3.2.

In *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle bases his account of contradiction on his characterization of a simple proposition as "that which asserts or denies something of something".[31] That leads him to say that

> It is possible both to affirm and deny the presence of something which is present or of something which is not.... Those positive and negative propositions are said to be contradictory which have the same subject and predicate. The identity of subject and of predicate must not be 'equivocal'.[32]

It might seem so obvious to say that contradictory propositions both assert and deny the presence of something which is present or absent that it is not worth mentioning. The point, however, is that for Aristotle, and for Boethius – and consequently for Anselm – what makes a pair of propositions contradictory is that their assertion or denial is concerned with *how things are*. As Aristotle goes on to say, that is why a pair of contradictory propositions *cannot* be true. It is noteworthy that Aristotle does not use the concept of truth to define contradiction.[33] Rather, contradictory propositions cannot be true because what they assert or deny cannot *be*.

Those comments suggest that *potest* would be better translated as "can", and often that is the case. But sometimes translating "*potest*" as "can" renders a true Latin sentence as a false English sentence. Anselm often uses "*non potest*" to describe something which lacks some ability. But whereas in Latin "*non*" comes before the verb "*potest*", English places "not" after the auxiliary verb "can". In English, "cannot exist" means, "is impossible to exist". But what Anselm means by "*non esse potest*" is "is able not to exist" – not "is impossible to exist". So, I will often choose to translate "*potest*" as "is able" because doing so renders the contrast between "*quod potest non esse*" and "*quod non potest non esse*" appropriately, as a contrast between what is able not to exist and what is unable not to exist.

Thirdly, while it is understandable to say that something which exists is able not to exist, some readers might find it quite odd to say that something which does not exist is also *able* not to exist, because anything which does not exist

31 Aristotle, *De Interpretione* 5.

32 Aristotle, *De Interpretione* 6.

33 As observed in Russell E. Jones,'Truth and Contradiction in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 6–9', *Phronesis*, 55:1 (2010), pp. 26–67, at p. 34.

does not have *any* abilities to do anything. Nor is Anselm suggesting that they do. It is a standard rule in both medieval and modern logic that it is valid to infer from "*p*" that "It is possible that *p*". That is all Anselm means when he says of something that *potest non esse*.

However, for Anselm, it was obvious that there is a necessary connection between abilities and the exercise of powers, because the verb "*potest*" ["is able"] is evident in the Latin word for power: "*potestas*". That connection is not obvious in English, and has to be argued for. To be "able to exist" expresses the possibility of being brought into existence endowed with enough power to keep on existing. For example, any living thing has to exercise some of its own abilities to interact regularly with its immediate environment in order to obtain from its environment the sustenance it needs to stay alive. But a thing's continuing to exist is not entirely dependent upon its own powers; it depends also on other things exercising their powers in ways which enable it to keep on existing and do not cause it to cease existing.

To be "able not to exist" not only means that what is able not to exist has the power to destroy itself, but also that *something else* has to power to end its existence, or prevent it from ever existing. Or something else which has the requisite powers to have brought it into existence might not have exercised those powers, and consequently it never exists.

Anselm points out in a number of his writings that we often make statements which, while true, are nevertheless expressed improperly. To speak of an ability not to exist is such a case. Anselm has a brief discussion of this issue in *Proslogion* VII, but in his later writings he includes extensive discussions of abilities and necessities which illuminate his frequent use in both the *Proslogion* and the *Reply* of "*potest*", and its subjunctive form "*possit*".

For example, in *De Casu Diaboli*, a dialogue written shortly after the *Reply*, he discusses in section XII how, in our common ways of speaking, we often say that something or someone has some ability quite improperly, pointing out that:

> we happen very often to say that a thing is able, not because it is able but because another thing is able, and to say that a thing which is able is unable, since another is unable. For example, if I say, "A book can be written by me", surely the book is unable, but I can write a book. And when we say, "This man is unable to be overcome by that man", we mean only that the latter is unable to overcome the former.

In the latter example, we might say of a man involved in a fight, or in a boxing contest, "This man is unable to be overcome". That sounds like a *dis*ability. However, despite the negative form of these words, it is because 'this man' is

stronger than the other man that the second is able to be overcome. It is the second man who has the disability of not being strong enough to overcome the first. However, Anselm does *not* infer that such improper uses of words are *untrue*. Rather, he is insisting that the truth of these improper statements has to be grounded in what *is* the case – not in what is *not* the case – and therefore always has to be traced back to the proper sources of the relevant powers.

The concept of powers is central to this account of possibilities and abilities. For Anselm, there is nothing remarkable in thinking of possibilities and abilities in terms of powers, since the connection is embedded in his language. As the words derived from "*possit*" migrated from Latin to English, what dropped from sight is the fact that that verb *potest* is also the root of the word "*potestas*", which means "power". For Anselm, writing in Latin, the words themselves make it obvious that possibilities and abilities are logically connected to powers.

In his book, *Anselm's Other Argument*, David Smith devotes two whole chapters – nearly 50 pages – to exploring Anselm's understanding of conceivability and possibility, far too much to survey here. As Smith rightly emphasizes, for Anselm, "possibilities and incapacities are referred back, ontologically, to some actually existing nature as their ground".[34] As Smith points out, for Anselm,

> things which do not yet exist, but will in the future, are able to exist because and only because they are of such a nature that something else has the power to bring them into existence. And they are 'able' not to exist because and only because they are of such a nature that something else has the power to prevent them from existing. But for Anselm it is true of *anything* other than God that at some point it did not exist, because of Creation.[35]

On the other hand, if anything is *unable* not to exist, it is not at risk of being annihilated. When we compare what *is able* not to exist with what *is unable* not to exist, the latter is the more powerful.

What abilities and capacities it is proper to ascribe to something or someone is, for Anselm, always a factual matter which concerns who or what has which abilities. This becomes clearest in the case of non-existents. For instance, I do not have a sister; my parents gave birth to only two sons. So, I have no sister who could have any abilities to do anything. But it is easy enough to imagine that my parents might have given birth to a third child who was female. As far as I know, that was possible. While Anselm would permit me to say that my

34 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 74.

35 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 77–78. Italics in original.

non-existent sister is able not to exist [*potest non esse*], this example clearly illustrates how that is an improper way of speaking, because it is not my potential sister who has the relevant abilities. Rather, my not having a sister is entirely the result of which abilities my parents actually exercised and the fact that my mother gave birth to two sons but no daughters.

There are many ways of understanding this claim which are not at all odd. After all, there were many things which once did exist but exist no more. For instance, all of my ancestors are dead, so they do not exist, but they were certainly able to exist, since they once did. That I exist now is proof of that. Archaeology, palaeontology, and history are disciplines devoted to what used to exist, but exists no more.

Not only that, I have no great-grandchildren, but I do have grandchildren and it is entirely possible that my grandchildren one day will give birth to their own children. Those children will thereby become my great-grandchildren. Thus, it is entirely possible that things which do not exist now will exist in the future. Those examples are about contingent beings which do not exist now, but whose existence is either past, or potentially in the future. The fact that they do not exist now does not prevent us making sense of the idea that it is possible to think of potential contingent beings which might have come into existence, although they have not, such as my non-existent sister.

So, saying that something is 'able not to exist' is at times a true but improper way of speaking. That is why it sounds strange. For all contingent beings, whether something is able to exist, or able not to exist, is not only an expression of that thing's powers, but it also involves the powers of something else. That is integral to Anselm's metaphysics. He maintains that if the existence of something is contingent, the fact that it does exist needs to be explained, and, in principle can be explained by identifying those other things which brought it into existence, and upon which it depends in order to continue existing.

When Anselm says that some existing thing "is able not to exist" [*potest non esse*], he means that it is not the kind of thing which exists necessarily. Rather, he is saying that it is possible that it does not exist at some time. Indeed, it might never exist, but if so, that is possible. And even if something which is able not to exist does actually exist, because its continuing to exist not only depends upon its exercising its own powers to maintain itself, but also upon the impact upon it of powers being exercised by other things, its continuing to exist is always precarious.

This talk of powers might seem quaint and old-fashioned. Indeed, in the 17th Century the playwright Molière generated much mirth by poking fun at those who spoke of powers. Talking of powers is certainly at odds with the prevailing view amongst English-speaking philosophers that *logical* possibilities

and necessities are the only sorts there are, and with the orthodoxy which follows David Hume in insisting that the only ontological ground of causal judgements are the universal correlations between kinds of 'objects' or 'events' – and between them there are no necessary connections. Within a Humean perspective, the only possible response to the question why such correlations occur is: "It is just a fact; they always do!". Empiricist philosophers are suspicious of talk of powers and dispositions, because, by their nature, they seem to concern not the present, actual behaviour of the 'objects' which possess them, but rather the future, and in some cases merely possible behaviour of those 'objects'.

However, that Humean view is nowadays coming under challenge from a number of quarters. A number of philosophers have argued recently that the models of explanation widely used in scientific discourse require a revival of the notion of powers and dispositions as irreducible features of reality. Since the issue is general in nature, I will adjourn discussing it until Chapter 12. For the present, it is enough to note that we know that salt is soluble – a disposition – because we have seen that when it is poured into water, it actually dissolves. And since salt actually dissolves in water, it is *able* to dissolve in water; that is an elementary modal inference. There is nothing mysterious about dispositions and abilities. And we exercise our powers every minute of every day. When in the reformulation of Anselm's three-stage argument it is inferred that what does not exist is able not to exist, that is not a distorted echo of out-dated metaphysics; it is explicable in terms regularly employed both in daily life today and in the models of explanation deployed in the sciences.

7 The Relation of Thinking to Understanding

Just as Anselm understands possibilities in terms of abilities and capacities, which in turn are grounded in powers, so what can and cannot be thought is ultimately determined by the interaction between the exercise of the powers by things, and our exercising our human capacity to think of and about them. Since Anselm is well aware that there are different ways in which people exercise their capacity to think, he is well aware that there are different ways in which something can be thought.

This is evident in his solution to the paradox generated by his argument for the existence of God. In Stage Three he concludes that God so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist. But that conclusion threatens to undercut his own argument, which began with his taking seriously the fact that the Fool had said in his heart that "There is not a god". Since 'saying in the heart' means 'thinking', it seems that Anselm has proven that the Fool could not have

thought what he manifestly did think! Anselm must resolve that paradox if his argument is to survive.

Anselm's solution is to point out that the phrase "can be thought" is ambiguous. In *Proslogion* IV he distinguishes two ways in which something can be thought. He says that:

> *For a thing is thought in one way when the word signifying it is thought, and in another way when the thing itself is understood. Accordingly, in the first way God can be thought not to exist, but not at all in the second.*

That way of expressing this distinction is not very clear. What precisely are these two ways of thinking?

I submit that Anselm is intending to draw the same distinction as the mathematician and logician Gottlob Frege drew in his famous paper, "On Sense and Reference" of 1892.[36] Frege distinguishes between the *sense* of a referring phrase and that thing to which that phrase is being used to *refer*. He introduces that distinction in order to resolve the puzzle of how two incompatible descriptions could be true of the same thing. The example he discusses is the fact that the Morning Star is the last which can be seen in the morning and the Evening Star is the first to appear in the evening, but they are identical, for this 'star' is in fact the planet Venus. This identity seems to violate Leibniz's Laws of Identity, which state that x and y are identical if, and only if, whatever is true of x is true of y. Frege's solution is to say that those two referring phrases have different *senses*, but both *refer* to the same thing.

What Frege calls the *sense* of a description is what the words used in that description standardly mean. Words have a standard signification however they are used, or misused, on some occasion. The phrase, "the Morning Star", signifies that shining object which is the last to be seen in the sky of a morning. That signification is certainly different from what the descriptive phrase "the Evening Star" signifies: the shining object which is the first to be seen in the sky of an evening. It is certainly possible to understand what those two phrases signify, but not understand that, in fact, the planet Venus is that thing of which those two disparate descriptions are true.

Anselm's terminology describes this phenomenon quite appropriately. When he says, "a thing is thought in one way when the word signifying it is thought", he is saying that to use a word, or phrase, which has a standard

36 Frege, Gottlob, 1892/1980. 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, 100: 25–50; translated as 'On Sense and Reference' by M. Black in Geach and Black (eds. and trans.) *Translations from the Writings of Gottlob Frege*, pp. 56–78.

signification is one way of thinking of a thing, but it is possible to think of a thing in that way without understanding what the thing itself is to which that signification points. That is how the Fool is able to say in his heart that "There is not a god" because he understands well enough how others use those words.

When Anselm says, "a thing is thought in another way when that thing itself [*id ipsum*] is understood", what he means is that there is a way of thinking of a thing which goes beyond what the words standardly signify to identify the thing itself to which reference is being made. That is, not only is the *sense* of the words which signify it understood, but *that* thing to which those words *refer* is also understood. Anselm's point is that if the Fool *understood* that which God is – that is, if he understood that God *is* that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – he would know that it is not possible that that which the word "God" signifies does not exist, and so he could not even think that thought.

Of course, Frege's technical terms, "*Sinn*" and "*Bedeutung*", were not available to Anselm, so I did pause to consider whether it would be anachronistic to explicate the two ways of thinking which Anselm distinguishes in terms of Frege's distinction of sense and reference. However, it seems to me that Anselm and Frege are drawing exactly the same distinction, only using different terminology.

This distinction clearly turns on the difference between two verbs which have related, but different meanings: "*cogitare*", which means "to think", and "*intelligere*", which means "to understand". Like the English verb "to think", "*cogitare*" has a broad range of uses. It can mean to think in the sense of merely entertaining a proposition which might be true or might be false. But it can also mean to believe, or to ponder or meditate, or to take heed of something, or to plan or intend to do something. In none of these uses does "*cogitare*" imply truth; what is thought can be false. On the other hand, "*intelligere*" (and its variant "*intellegere*") is a way of thinking which does imply truth. It is one of a wide range of verbs which have success built in. Something can only be understood if how it is *understood* to be is how it *actually is*.

Gaunilo and Anselm agree that understanding has this logical feature. They have a difference of opinion about a suggestion of Gaunilo who commented in *On Behalf of the Fool* VII:

> But when it is said that this supreme thing [*summa res ista*] could not be thought not to exist, it would perhaps have been better said that it could not be understood that it does not exist or that it even could be non-existent. For according to the proper meaning of this word, false things [*falsa*] cannot be understood, although they can undoubtedly be thought in the same way that the Fool thought there is no God.

As already noted in §2.2, Anselm rejected that suggestion in *Reply* IV. Having reformulated his Stage Two argument in response to Gaunilo's counter-example of the Lost Island,[37] Anselm begins *Reply* IV by reporting what Gaunilo had said, quoted above, and comments:

> *If I had said that the thing itself could not be understood not to exist, perhaps you would suggest that nothing which exists can be understood not to exist, since you say that, according to the meaning of the word, false things cannot be understood. For it is false that what exists does not exist. Therefore, it is not a unique property* [*proprium*] *of God that He could not be understood not to exist.*

Since Anselm has argued in Stage Three that God, and only God, could not be *thought* not to exist, he is entitled to assert in *Reply* IV that that is a unique property of God, whereas it follows from Gaunilo's suggestion that *everything* which exists could not be understood not to exist. Accepting Gaunilo's suggestion would destroy Anselm's argumentative strategy.

It is notable, however, that Anselm does not take issue with Gaunilo's contention that understanding is truth-entailing. Unlike the verb "to think", he accepts that the verb "to understand" implies cognitive success. Only what is so can properly be understood. Of course, it is possible that we have *mis*understood something which we believe we have understood. But to *mis*understand is not to understand properly; we can *believe* mistakenly that we have understood something which we have, in fact, *not* understood.

One significant consequence of this is that:

(13) Whatever is impossible cannot be understood.

I call this *Anselm's Intelligibility Principle*. This simple principle will prove significant in justifying vital inferences in the reformulation of both Stages One and Three of Anselm's proof. It is sound because what is impossible cannot be. Since to understand something implies cognitive success, what cannot be cannot be understood. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it: "To understand is to perceive the significance, or explanation, or cause of". In Anselm's Latin

37 I will discuss in Chapter 7 Gaunilo's parody of Anselm's Stage One and Anselm's response. That will include an examination in §7.10 of how in *Reply* III Anselm reformulates his Stage Two argument on a cosmological basis.

the verb "*intelligere*" means the same. Only what is possible can be understood, and what is properly understood is so.[38]

For Anselm, thinking has an orientation towards reality. In this respect, thinking is like speaking, in that *to understand is the proper function of thinking*. When we are thinking of things which actually are as we think they are, our thoughts are true. That is, our thoughts are directed towards what is as it is. Our ability to think is a capacity to contemplate reality even when it is not present. The function of thinking is to activate that capacity in order to contemplate matters beyond those with which we are in immediate contact.

It is that detachment from the immediacy of our interactions with reality which makes it possible for thinking to range so widely, to stray so far, and to be so creative. We can think what is not true because, in general, we understand what it would be for that thought to be true, even when it is not. Moreover, we can think of what used to be, but is no longer, and we can think of how things might be in the future, whether or not that thought comes true. Just as in speaking it is possible to say what is in fact false, so it is possible that what is thought is false. But whenever we do that, we are not thinking aright, because we have not understood what it is that we are thinking about.

This account of understanding as an exercise of thinking which fulfils its proper function implies that there is more to thinking than merely a matter of entertaining some sentence in thought. In particular, the possibility of thinking something is not determined just by the absence of contradiction, as that is understood nowadays as purely a matter of semantic consistency. Because Anselm has a teleological account of truth, he has a teleological account of thinking. Just as the proper function of words is to signify what is as and when it is, so the proper function of the activity of thinking is to direct one's thoughts towards what is so. Because Anselm understands that so well, that is what enables his quest to move forwards.

What emerges from our examination of the relation of conceivability to intelligibility is that, for Anselm, what can be thought is constrained by what is possible, and what is possible depends on how things actually are. Just as both being able to exist and being able not to exist are grounded in the exercise of powers by something else, so what can be thought is ultimately grounded in something *other* than thought itself. For something can be thought only if it is *able* to be, and what is able to be is grounded in what actually is. The order

38 In his *De Veritate*, written shortly after his exchange with Gaunilo, Anselm develops this account further. I have argued in Chapter Six of *Truth and Historicity* that Anselm presents there a teleological account of truth, in which both things and statements have proper functions to perform, and their truth consists in their doing 'what they ought'.

of logical priority enshrined in that sentence reflects the order of ontological priority.

Given this account of how thinking is related to understanding, it follows from Anselm's Intelligibility Principle, (13), and the distinction he draws in *Proslogion* IV between two ways in which something can be thought that:

(14) Whatever is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.

It will be seen that this principle plays a significant role in a number of his inferences.

With those issues clarified, we are almost ready to begin to reformulate Anselm's three-stage proof of the existence of God as an explicitly cosmological argument. That reformulation will begin by examining how he himself enunciated in the *Reply* some general principles about whatever is other than God and showing how those principles are confirmed by recent developments in cosmology.

8 The Logic of Conceivability

While some critics belittle Anselm's logical acumen, the more I explore his texts, the greater grows my respect for the acuity and sensitivity of his reasoning. I find that he has a finely tuned sense of logical propriety which is reflected in the inferences he makes involving the related concepts of possibility, conceivability, and understanding.

I remarked in §1.3 that the whole point of having rules of inference is to ensure that truth is preserved as reasoning proceeds to a conclusion which thereby comes to be understood. Anselm never articulates the rules he deploys in the *Proslogion*. We readers have to infer the rules he is deploying from his practice. They are all listed at the beginning of Appendix B. I have ascertained that, with one exception, all of the rules of inference which Anselm deploys to infer his conclusions are still recognized by modern logicians as standard and uncontroversial. But he does operate with one rule of inference which is his very own innovation. While this novel rule seems unexceptional, it proves to be very powerful. He could not have constructed his argument without it.

The phrase "cannot be thought" is at the heart of Anselm's so-called formula. Inferences involving the phrase "It can be thought that …" occur frequently in the texts of both the *Proslogion* and the *Reply*. Logically, that phrase is an operator which forms a larger sentence out of a sentence. However, there is one

passage in his *Reply* where he explicitly articulates a logical principle which is obvious evidence of his having adopted that novel rule. We can infer his novel rule of inference from the logical principle it implies.

Anselm reports in *Reply* v that he has heard that certain readers find some of the objections against his position to be valid. He protests that Gaunilo has misrepresented his descriptive phrase as "something which is greater than everything", and insists that that phrase does not have the same force as his own descriptive phrase for the purpose of proving that what is spoken of is in reality. He then continues:

> *For if someone should say that* [something]*-than-which-a greater-cannot-be-thought is not something in reality, or is able not to exist, or even can be thought not to exist, he can be easily refuted.*

Since his response to each of those three alternative denials is the same, he announces a logical principle which links them together, and which will enable him to refute all three denials simultaneously.[39] What he writes next is the logical principle:

> *Nam quod non est, potest non esse; et quod non esse potest, cogitari potest non esse.*

That is usually translated, with minor variations, as:

> (15) What does not exist is able not to exist, and what is able not to exist can be thought not to exist.[40]

This claim sounds a little odd, but we will see that these two implications exemplify his basic rules of inference. There are three points to note about this principle.

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39 As far as I am aware, David Smith is the only commentator to draw attention to this *Reply* v principle, despite its being so central to Anselm's argumentation. In his *Anselm's Other Argument*, he frequently refers to this principle as motivating much of Anselm's arguments. However, it seems that Smith had not recognized just how fundamental this principle is in Anselm's reasoning, for had he done so, he would not have made quite a number of the assessments with which I disagree.

40 That is how Jasper Hopkins & Herbert Richardson (p. 129), Ian Logan (p. 76), and Matthew Walz *Proslogion: Including Gaunilo's Objections and Anselm's Replies*, for example, translate this sentence. Sidney Deane, however, translates it as, "For the non-existence of what does not exist is possible, and that whose non-existence is possible can be conceived not to exist"; Deane, Sidney Norton, *St Anselm – Basic Writings*, 2nd Edn.

The first is that the appearance of this claim as a little odd is an artefact of its English translation, not of Anselm's Latin original. How Anselm treats statements expressing possibilities and abilities has already been discussed in §3.6. I observed there how, in Latin, the one verb, "*potest*" suffices for what in English is expressed by three different verbs: "is possible"; "is able"; and "can". So, the Latin sentence above could equally well have been translated as:

> (16) For what does not exist possibly does not exist, and what possibly does not exist can be thought not to exist.

That does not sound odd at all; the first implication is licensed by the simplest of modal inferences:

> It is valid to infer from any proposition "*p*" that "It is possible that *p*".

I call that simple, standard rule of inference the *Inferring Possibility rule*. The validity of that inference is uncontroversial. It was well recognized in medieval times and is a basic inference in modern systems of modal logic.

Secondly, whilst Anselm maintains that it is *true* to say that what does not exist is able not to exist, we have already seen in §3.6 that he acknowledges that expressing that truth in that way is 'improper'. As David Smith observes,

> This claim [that what does not exist is able not to exist] is, we now see, doubly improper in Anselm's eyes. It treats as an ability what is in fact an imperfection: ontological weakness, as it were. And it ascribes it to a non-existent.[41]

Obviously, since Anselm uses this *Reply* V principle as a premise in the argument he develops in *Reply* V, he believes that that premise is true, even if it is improper.

Thirdly, since Anselm's *Reply* V principle (15) asserts two linked implications, the rules which justify those two implications are manifestly valid. No-one doubts that it is valid to infer propositions stating that something is possible from propositions stating that it is so. Anselm's insight is to recognize that it is also valid to infer propositions stating that something can be thought from propositions stating that it is possible.

All that is required to see this is to recognize that (16) may be expressed equivalently as:

41 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 77.

(17) For any *x*, if *x* does not exist, it is possible that *x* does not exist, and if it is possible that *x* does not exist, it can be thought that *x* does not exist.

Expressing Anselm's *Reply* V principle as (17) makes it clear that there is a single proposition common to the three modalities of non-existence mentioned, namely: "*x* does not exist". Once that is recognized, the cogency of this principle does not seem to depend upon the fact that the embedded proposition is "*x* does not exist". Since the first implication is validated by the Inferring Possibility rule, which is both quite general and uncontroversial, it is true of any proposition. So, it appears that it would be equally proper to generalize the second implication in (17) so that it too is true of any proposition. That is, I submit that the principle would be just as valid if any other proposition were substituted in (17) in lieu of "*x* does not exist". For Anselm's purposes in *Reply* V, the relevant proposition was "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist", but I cannot think of any reason why the principle would not be true of any proposition.

That second implication in Anselm's *Reply* V principle is his own special innovation. It results from extending the Inferring Possibility rule one step further. It appears to be an application of a general rule of inference which Anselm frequently deploys, but never explicitly articulates as such. But it is clear from examining many of Anselm's arguments that, in addition to the Inferring Possibility Rule, he also maintains that:

> It is valid to infer from "It is possible that *p*" that "It is possible to think that *p*", that is, "It can be thought that *p*".

I call this rule of inference *Anselm's Conceivability rule*. It asserts in the form of a rule of inference what the second implication in his Conceivability Principle asserts as a proposition, as will be shown below. So far as I have been able to ascertain, this rule is distinctively his own. No doubt, he believed it to be as sound an inferential rule as all those standardly recognized.

It is not difficult to justify this rule. For suppose that we assume "It is not possible that *p*". It follows by the contrapositive of the Inferring Possibility rule that "Not-*p*".[42] Thus, the very fact that we have assumed that "It is not possible that *p*" shows that it is possible to think that not-*p*. And if it is possible to think that not-*p*, it is possible to think that *p*. That is, it can be thought that *p*.

42 As explained in n. 13 in Chapter 2, the contrapositive of 'If *p*, then *q*' is 'If not-*q*, then not-*p*'. Any two propositions paired in that way are equivalent.

I find that inference indubitable, I cannot think of any reason not to accept Anselm's assertion of that second implication, given that the first implication is a standard principle of modal logic. So, I submit that this rule is worthy of being acknowledged as another Anselm's intellectual discoveries.

I believe that Anselm formulated his *Reply* V principle as two linked implications in order to make it clear that, in order to assert that something can be thought, it is necessary to establish first that it is possible. This imposes a significant restriction on what can properly be thought. Many people nowadays believe that anyone can think whatever one likes, and that whatever they think must be respected. However, Anselm's rule requires that before one asserts that something 'can be thought', one must first establish either that it is true, or that it is at least possible. This insistence goes to the heart of the validity of all his logical inferences.

An example of Anselm's invoking that rule occurs in *Proslogion* II where he asserts that:

(18) If it [i.e., that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] is *solely* in the understanding, it can be thought to be also in reality.

Most commentators interpret this assertion as dependent upon a 'background assumption' that "Whatever is 'in the understanding' can be thought to be in reality", and bother about whether this universal claim is sound. But Anselm is not invoking any such 'background assumption'. He is *inferring* the consequent of (18) from its antecedent. For if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, then that thing itself is understood to be something than which a greater cannot be thought. Anselm is entitled to introduce that thing as an exemplar of *something* than which a greater cannot be thought because, as was shown in §3.5, that thing is a representative of *anything* than which a greater cannot be thought. It was shown in §3.4. that it is *possible* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists. As we saw in §3.7, Gaunilo and Anselm agree that what is impossible cannot be understood. It follows that what can be understood can be in reality. That suffices to establish that it is not *impossible* that this thing is in reality, and since it is *possible* that the thing itself is in reality, then it follows, by Anselm's Conceivability rule, that it *can be thought* to be in reality. That justifies Anselm's inference (18).

There are a number of other instances in the *Proslogion* where Anselm uses a corollary of these rules to justify a number of inferences. Let us assume that some arbitrarily selected proposition "*p*" is true. Applying the standard rule of Inferring Possibility to any proposition "*p*" justifies the assertion of:

(19) If *p*, it is possible that *p*.

It follows from applying Anselm's Conceivability rule to the consequent of (19) that:

(20) If it is possible that *p*, it can be thought that *p*.

It then follows from (18) and (19), by the standard rule called "Hypothetical Syllogism", that:

(21) If *p*, it can be thought that *p*.

I call (21) *Anselm's Conceivability Principle*. Anselm deploys both his Conceivability rule and his Conceivability Principle in formulating many of his arguments. As we explore how his proof can be reformulated it will be seen that both are required in a variety of contexts.

What I am calling his "Conceivability Principle" is a generalized form of his *Reply* V principle. It appears that he asserted the latter principle as two linked implications in order to make it clear that, in order to assert that something can be thought, it is necessary to establish first that it is possible. This imposes a significant restriction on what can properly be thought. Many people nowadays believe that anyone can think whatever one likes, and that whatever they think must be respected. However, Anselm's rule requires that before one asserts that something can be thought, in the sense that the thing itself is understood, one must first establish either that it is true, or that it is at least possible. This insistence goes to the heart of the validity of all his logical inferences.

Anselm's Conceivability Principle reflect his underlying metaphysics, although few commentators have paid heed to what they imply. It is fundamental to all of Anselm's reasoning that what we humans can think is ultimately based on what is so. For he takes seriously the fact that what is possible is grounded in what is so, and what can be thought is limited to what is possible. That is the only basis on which it may be claimed that something can be thought: for something to be thought, with understanding, it must be *possible*. And for him, what is possible involves what are sometimes called 'real possibilities' – abilities and capacities – which are grounded in actuality.

Since what is so implies what is able to be – that is, what is possible – and what is able to be implies what can be thought, the contrapositive of his Conceivability Principle is also true. That is, what *cannot* be thought not to be implies what is *unable* not to be – that is, what is necessary – and what is unable not to be implies what is. Reversing his Conceivability principle in this way

therefore provides a way of proving what exists from what cannot be thought to be otherwise. While Anselm's Stage One argument moves in the opposite direction from that enshrined in his Conceivability Principle, reversing that principle reveals the underlying ontological priority of reality over thinking.

That is why Anselm is able in *Proslogion* II validly to infer that something exists from what can be thought and understood. As was shown in §2.5, Anselm explains in *Reply* VIII how his so-called formula, "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" is not an idea which he introduces *a priori*, but is grounded in our everyday experience of finding some things to be better than others. It is because, *but only because*, what can be thought and understood has to be inferred from what is possible, and what is possible is grounded in what is so.

There are also a number of instances in the *Proslogion* where Anselm deploys an extension of his Conceivability rule. For example, as foreshadowed in §1.6, the comment which Anselm attaches to (18), "which is greater", is justified because it is demonstrated in Appendix A that:

> (22) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality.

Having derived that conditional proposition, Anselm then infers that:

> (23) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, it can be thought that it is greater than if it were not in reality.

Although Anselm does not explain why it is valid to infer (23) from (22), this inference is justified by the following rule:

> From "If *p*, then *q*", it is valid to infer "If it can be thought that *p*, then it can be thought that *q*".

I call that rule *Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule*. It justifies the inference of (23) from (21), and a number of other inferences both in Anselm's deductions in the *Proslogion*, and in the cosmological reformulation of his proof presented in Chapters Four, Six, and Ten.

That this rule is implied by his Conceivability rule can easily be shown. Consider any implication of the form:

> (24) If *p*, then *q*.

It was noted above that it is one of the most basic rules of modal logic that is valid to infer from any proposition "*p*" that "It is possible that *p*". It also a basic rule of modal logic that from any proposition of the form of (24) it is valid to infer:

(25) If it is possible that *p*, then it is possible that *q*.

Now, (25) is equivalent to:

(26) Either it is not possible that *p*, or it is possible that *q*.

The rule of inference known as "Constructive Dilemma" provides that a conclusion may be deduced from a disjunction by deducing a conclusion from each disjunct, and then disjoining those two conclusions. Since (26) is a disjunction, that rule may be applied to it. It follows from the first disjunct in (26) – "It is not possible that *p*" – by invoking (13) – which I have called Anselm's Intelligibility Principle, "*Whatever is impossible cannot be understood*", that:

(27) *p* cannot be understood.

When in the course of his arguments both in the *Proslogion* and in the *Reply*, Anselm says something of the form, "It can be thought that …" or "It cannot be thought that …", he is always meaning that to be interpreted in the *second* of the two ways he distinguished in *Proslogion* IV and which was discussed in §3.7. So, invoking that distinction, it follows from (27) that:

(28) It cannot be thought that *p* in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.

Turning now to the other disjunct in (26), it follows straightforwardly, by Anselm's Conceivability rule, that:

(29) It can be thought that *q*.

The rule of Constructive Dilemma says that from a premise of the form "*p* or *q*" it is valid to infer a conclusion of the form "*r* or *s*" if, and only if "*p*" implies "*r*" and "*q*" implies "*s*". Since (28) has been validly deduced from the first disjunct in (26) and (29) has been validly deduced from the second disjunct in (26), it follows from (26), by the rule of Constructive Dilemma, that:

(30) Either it cannot be thought that *p*, or it can be thought that *q*.

Reversing the form of inference by which (26) was inferred from (25), (30) is equivalent to:

(31) If it can be thought that *p*, it can be thought that *q*.

Since (31) has been validly inferred from (24), that validates what I am calling Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule.

These rules and that principle is what enables Anselm to probe the limits of what can be thought with understanding. The whole of the *Proslogion* is pervaded by the awe with which Anselm approaches the loftiness of God, even as he strives to understand what he believes. We today have largely lost that sense of awe. Humanity has made enormous strides, both in understanding the basic processes in the world, and in harnessing them technologically. More blasé, and more confident of our collective ability to overcome problems, we are pushing the frontiers of knowledge yet further. The ability of ordinary humans to do what once would have seemed impossible has weakened the intensity of wonder at the world in which we live, and what sustains it.

CHAPTER 4

A Cosmological Reformulation of Stage One of Anselm's Proof

We saw in §1.6.1 that Stage One of Anselm's proof of the existence of God begins with the premise:

(1:1) Anselm has spoken of something than which nothing greater could be thought.

That premise is backed by the explanation he later provides in *Reply* VIII of how any rational mind can infer that concept, an explanation which was discussed in §2.5. The argument I am about to present begins at that step in the ascent of thought which Anselm describes in that passage where he says:

> *Indeed, who … cannot think that, if something which has a beginning and an end is good, there is a much better good, which, although it begins, nevertheless does not cease? And just as the latter is better than the former, so that which does not have an end or a beginning is better than the latter, even if it should pass from the past through the present into the future.*

Instead of beginning Stage One with establishing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, as Anselm did in *Proslogion* II, this alternative argument will begin with the undeniable fact that:

(1) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

Like his original Stage One, this reformulation will be in two phases. Just as in *Proslogion* II Anselm devotes its first phase to establishing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding in order to establish common ground with his opponent, the Fool, the first phase of this reformulation of his proof will be devoted to justifying the premise (1), thereby establishing common ground with those sceptics who reject Anselm's original Stage One because he deduces that something exists from its being in the understanding. This first phase will occupy §4.1 to §4.5.

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The premise (1) will be justified in §4.5 on the basis of that review. In §4.6 to §4.8 it will be shown that from the premise (1), together with a premise specifying what it is to have a beginning and the two premises identified in §3.3, entail that "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality". That conclusion not only implies Anselm's own Stage One conclusion – that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality – but it also implies that it is not one of the myriads of things which exist in the universe. Then in §4.9 it will be shown that those same premises entail an even stronger conclusion, "It is necessary that that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist".

1 The Development of Modern Cosmology

Modern cosmology began in 1905, when Albert Einstein introduced his Special Theory of Relativity.[1] It proposed a radical departure from the Newtonian concepts of space and time and a new conceptual framework for all of physics. For Einstein determined that the laws of physics are the same for all observers moving in a straight line at constant speed, and that the speed of light in a vacuum is independent of the motion of all observers. He then spent the next ten years trying to accommodate acceleration within that theory, leading to the publication in 1915 of his General Theory of Relativity. In it, Einstein applied to the universe as a whole some gravitational field equations he had developed in order to describe how space, time, matter, and energy interact. Massive objects, such as the Sun, cause a distortion in space-time, which in Newtonian physics was interpreted as a mysterious force called "gravity".

A consequence of Einstein's new theory is that space, time, energy, and matter are all fused so that spacetime is no longer independent of what is 'in' spacetime. In both Einstein's Special and General Theories of Relativity, there is a 'metric tensor' which enables one to distinguish between those relative frames of reference which are rotating (and accelerating) and those which are not. But in his General Theory, this tensor becomes dynamic, and can be curved by the presence of massy bodies.

1 The historical details mentioned in the following review have been described by many authors. One accessible account is provided by Jean-Pierre Luminet, 'The Rise of Big Bang Models, from Myth to Theory and Observations', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/1887997 (accessed 20 December 2018).

By this time, it had become an established principle, accepted by all physicists, that the universe is isotropic – that is, that it is the same in all directions – and that it is homogeneous – that is, that there are no special places in the universe. That there are no special places was the 'heresy' proposed by Nicolaus Copernicus, who first floated in 1514 his idea that the sun was the centre of the solar system, and eventually in the year of his death, 1543, published his major work, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* [On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres]. He rejected the Aristotelian view which had prevailed for two millennia, that the Earth is the centre of the universe, which revolves around it.

Based on two assumptions – the field equations of General Relativity, and the assumption that the universe is isotropic and homogeneous – in the early 1920s, Alexander Friedmann derived a set of dynamic equations which imply that the universe is either expanding or contracting. That the universe was in fact expanding was first proposed in 1927 by the Belgian astronomer and Catholic priest, Georges-Henri Lemaître. He proposed, on purely speculative grounds, and independently of Friedmann, that there is a linear relation between the velocity at which galaxies are moving and the distance they have travelled, which led him to conclude that the universe was expanding at a uniform rate. In 1931, Lemaitre extended that proposal by claiming that the universe has been expanding from a 'primeval atom'. Although Lemaître's calculations showed that an expanding universe was consistent with Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, Einstein himself disagreed, and reportedly told Lemaître, "Your calculations are correct, but your physics is abominable".

All of this was pure theoretical speculation, but in 1924, Edwin Hubble published his discovery that many of the diffuse objects in the sky, called nebulae, were in fact distant galaxies. His observations showed that our own Milky Way is not the only galaxy. Then, in 1929, he reported that light coming from the galaxies he was observing shifted to various degrees towards the red end of the spectrum, and that the further away these distant light-sources are, the greater is the redshift. This evidence indicated that the observable universe is expanding, and that, extrapolating backwards in time, everything in it must have been much closer together in the past.

Astronomical observations made since the 1920s, using new and more powerful telescopes to observe distant galaxies, have confirmed those assumptions; what we can see of the universe looks the same in all directions. It has been found that the average density of the galaxies is the same throughout the universe, and is not significantly affected by differences in distance or direction. The universe appears smooth at cosmological scales. It has since been established that the universe is only approximately homogeneous and isotropic,

for there were small deviations from perfect homogeneity and isotropy early on.[2] Some regions were slightly more dense than other regions. Slightly more dense means more mass, more gravity to slow the expansion. So these "perturbations" grew over time. When the density of an over-dense region became large enough, that region would have stopped expanding altogether. The matter present within that region became *gravitationally bound*. This is how clusters of galaxies and within them, galaxies, and within those solar systems, stars and planets were able to form.[3]

When the Friedmann equations which describe the expansion of the universe are projected backwards in time, the modelling shows the universe to be shrinking until all distances tend towards zero. So a number of cosmologists began to theorize that the very early universe had perhaps burst into existence from nothing. In a BBC radio broadcast in 1949, this account was attacked by the astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, who, thinking such a speculation literally incredible, ridiculed it by calling it "the Big Bang". However, the term soon became part of scientific parlance, thanks to its being championed by George Gamow, a Russian-born American physicist who had been a former student of Friedmann. Hoyle therefore unwittingly played a major part in popularising a theory which he believed to be false.

Hoyle himself was the leading proponent of 'steady state cosmology'. That the universe is in a 'steady state' was first proposed in the 1920s by Sir James Jeans, but was reformulated in 1948 by Hoyle, Thomas Gold, and Hermann Bondi. Cosmologists Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok explain Hoyle's stance and motivations thus:

> Hoyle, in particular, found the big bang abhorrent because he was vehemently antireligious and he thought the cosmological picture was disturbingly close to the biblical account. To avoid the bang, he and his collaborators were willing to contemplate the idea that matter and radiation were continually created throughout the universe in just such a way as to keep the density and temperature constant as the universe expands. This steady-state picture was the last stand for advocates of the unchanging universe concept, setting off a three-decade battle with proponents of the big bang model.[4]

2 "Homogeneous" means that the physics of the universe is the same everywhere, and "isotropic" means that there ae no preferred directions in the universe.

3 Viktor T. Toth 'If the universe is expanding, why are gravity "locked" planets not affected by the expansion?', https://quora.com.au, 23 April 2020 (accessed 14 March 2021).

4 Paul J. Steinhardt, & Neil Turok, *Endless Universe: Beyond the Big Bang*.

At the time, Hoyle also had good empirical reasons for opposing the theory of a big bang. Because of errors in measuring light from distant galaxies, Hubble had seriously miscalculated the age of the universe as 1.8 billion years. Geologists claimed that Earth and the solar system were probably many billions of years older than that. So, it seemed that the Big Bang occurred long after planet Earth was formed, which is impossible. This inconsistency was caused by errors in Hubble's initial measurements, which have since been refined so that there is no longer any inconsistency between the findings of cosmology and of geology. The exact value of the unit of measurement used to describe the expansion of the universe (usually referred to as the Hubble parameter, or the Hubble constant), and its rate of expansion, are now known with an error of less than 1%. Cosmology has gone from being a qualitative theory to becoming a precise quantitative theory, with the Hubble Space Telescope (named after him) allowing measurements of the distances to nearby galaxies to an accuracy of +/– 10%.

One problem with the original idea proposed by Friedmann and Lemaître was to explain how the decay of a single 'primeval atom' could generate the formation of hydrogen and helium, the building blocks from which all the other elements were formed. Gamow and his former student and colleague, Ralph Alpher, tackled this problem by starting with the density of matter in the universe today and running the clock backwards. They thereby envisioned what would happen if everything was being compressed into an increasingly denser state. As the pressure increased, the temperature would rise, and the molecules would disintegrate into atoms, and the atoms would further disintegrate into their constituent particles.

In his 1948 dissertation, with Gamow as his supervisor, Alpher then showed that the expansion of the universe began, not from matter, but from radiation. Firstly, he proposed that the very early state of the universe was an ultra-dense mixture of high-energy photons: heat radiation. If any nuclear particles, such as neutrons and protons, became bound together by the attractive nuclear force to form deuterium, at this extremely high temperature, the photons' kinetic energy would overwhelm the binding energy of the strong nuclear force, and break them apart. Then, as the universe expanded, it would produce all of the elementary 'particles' needed to explain the genesis of the lightest nuclei (deuterium, helium, and lithium) during the first three minutes, at an epoch when the cosmic temperature reached 10 billion degrees. This extension of the original model is now referred to as the 'hot' Big Bang.

A few months after the publication of parts of his dissertation, Alpher, collaborating with Robert Hermann, predicted that it should be possible to detect residual relics of the Big Bang in the form of 'blackbody' radiation at a fossil

temperature of about 5 degrees above absolute zero. Their prediction did not generate any excitement, but they kept refining their calculations until 1956, although without generating any more interest. No specific attempts at detection were undertaken.

However, at Princeton University in the middle of the 1960s, the theorists Robert Dicke and James Peebles were studying oscillatory models in which a closed universe cycles through periods of expansion and contraction, passing through a minimum radius before bouncing into a new cycle, instead of being infinitely crushed in a big crunch. They calculated that such a hot bounce would cause blackbody radiation detectable today at a temperature of 10 degrees above absolute zero. They then learnt that radiation of this type was detected by accident in 1965 by two researchers (Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson) working at Bell Telephone Laboratories. Engaged in creating a radio receiver, they were puzzled by the noise it was picking up. They soon established that the noise came uniformly from all over the sky.

It was this discovery of Cosmic Microwave Background radiation, a key prediction of the Big Bang model, which led to general acceptance of that model. In the 1990s, scientists were puzzled when they found that their estimate of the age of the universe – based on their measurement of the Hubble constant – was several billion years younger than the age of the oldest stars. However, in 1998, Adam Riess, Sal Perlmutter, and Brian Schmidt found the root of the problem. Not only is the universe continuing to expand, but it is not expanding at a steady rate; the rate of expansion is *accelerating*.[5]

Then in 2013, the European Space Agency created an impressively detailed map based on observations by the Planck telescope of the temperature fluctuations in the Cosmic Microwave Background radiation, and estimated the age of the universe to be 13.771 billion years, plus or minus 59 million years. In 2015 that calculation was refined to around 13.799 ± 0.021 billion years. The radius from here to the cosmic horizon of the observable universe has been calculated to be 46.5 billion light years, and its diameter 93 billion light years. Further data obtained by the Planck telescope, and released in 2018, has provided more evidence of the existence of 'dark matter' and 'dark energy', mysterious forces which are likely to be responsible for the observed acceleration of the expansion of the universe. But much still remains obscure.

A second major revision of the basic Big Bang model was to add small density ripples just after the original hot Bang. Einstein's General Theory of Relativity had predicted that the combined density of matter and energy

5 To be clear, when it is said that the universe is expanding, that does not mean that expanding is something which space itself does, but rather that things in the universe are flying apart.

would vary slightly from place to place in the early universe. Such ripples, or waves, would cause perturbations in the gravitational field. The gravitational attraction of matter-energy peaks in these ripples began attracting particles around them until they reached a maximum radius, at which point they collapsed back on themselves forming a self-gravitating object. The first of these collapsed objects formed roughly a million years after the Big Bang, and were in turn clumped irregularly – due to larger-scale density ripples – and clusters of them quickly began to emerge in a process which built the structure of the universe we see today. The detection of polarization of the Cosmic Microwave Background radiation indicated that the prediction of gravitational waves might be true.

Confirming the existence of gravitational waves would settle the last prediction still outstanding from Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, but finding evidence to confirm this prediction has been difficult because the effects are so miniscule. However, in September 2015, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory collaboration, better known as LIGO, switched on its upgraded detectors on 12 September 2015. Within 48 hours, it had made its first detection. It took a few months before the researchers had enough confidence in the signal to announce a discovery. Headlines around the world soon heralded one of the greatest scientific breakthroughs of the past century. In 2017, a Nobel prize followed.

Other waves have since been detected. In September 2020 it was announced that three detectors had picked up a signal lasting less than one-tenth of a second.[6] It was generated by a source roughly 5 gigaparsecs away, when the universe was about half its age, making it one of the most distant gravitational-wave sources detected so far. Most likely, it was produced by the merging of two massive black holes.

2 The Inflationary Model

A third major revision of the Big Bang model added the concept of 'inflation'. Despite the increasing evidence supporting the hypothesis that something like the 'Big Bang' occurred, the standard account of it engendered a number of problems. Two were especially worrisome; they were called "the flatness problem" and "the horizon problem". It was to overcome these two problems that,

6 Abbott, R. *et al.*, 'Properties and Astrophysical Implications of the 150 $M_{\odot}$ Binary Black Hole Merger GW190521', *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, 900, No. 1, published 1 September 2020, and *Physical Review Letters* 125, 101102, published 2 September 2020.

in 1980, François Englert and Alan Guth independently proposed the idea of 'cosmic inflation'.

The 'flatness problem' relates to the lack of an explanation as to why, on cosmological scales, the geometry of the universe appears to satisfy the rules of Euclidean geometry. The 'horizon problem' arises from observations of the Cosmic Microwave Background radiation. This ancient radiation which has been detected at the edge, or 'horizon' of the observable universe has been found to have close to the same temperature everywhere. The problem was how to explain this near uniformity since there has not been enough time since the 'Big Bang' for regions on opposite sides of the universe to have been in causal contact with one another, given that the exchange of information is limited by the speed of light.

The idea of 'cosmic inflation' was proposed by Englert and Guth as a solution to these two problems. Because the original 'Big Bang' model was based on the General Theory of Relativity and the assumption that the universe is homogeneous and isotropic – at any rate, on large scales – it is a classical theory; that is, it did not take into account quantum phenomena. But as the modelling is projected backwards in time, the observable universe shrinks to a size at which the indeterminacy of quantum phenomena becomes relevant. Re-describing the beginnings of the universe by taking into account what happens at the subatomic level led to a radical revision of the original Big Bang model. As Guth has commented, "inflation is an add-on to the standard Big Bang theory; it supplies the beginning to which the standard Big Bang theory then becomes the continuation".[7] As Guth himself explains,

> The key idea is the fact that most modern particle theories predict that there should exist a state of matter that turns gravity on its head, creating a gravitational repulsion. This state can only be reached at energies well beyond those that we can probe experimentally, but the theoretical arguments for the existence of the state are rather persuasive. It is not merely the prediction of some specific theory, but it is the generic prediction for a wide class of plausible theories. Thus, gravity does not always have to be attractive.[8]

According to this idea, all of the observable universe originated in a tiny, causally connected region. Because that region was so small, there was a brief

7 Alan Guth, 'How does Inflation Work?' https://counterbalance.org/cq-guth/howdo-frame.html (accessed 14 January 2019).

8 Guth, 'How does Inflation Work?'

period when it could come to a uniform temperature, before inflation took place. It is proposed that very early universe then went through a period of hyper-accelerated, exponential expansion during the first 10^{-35} of a second. By some calculations, inflation increased the size of the universe by a factor of around 10^{26} during that tiny fraction (far less than a trillionth) of a second. It then settled down to the more sedate rate of expansion still being detected.

This model solves both the 'flatness problem' and 'horizon problem'. For it implies that regions which are widely separated today would have been in very close causal contact and would have equilibrated to a common temperature. That is why photons from these regions have (almost) exactly the same temperature. In this model, the extremely rapid expansion of the very early universe flattens out any large-scale inhomogeneities in temperature and density, quickly creating a large cosmos out of a much smaller one which was previously causally connected.

According to this model, before inflation, there are no 'things'. There are no atoms, because the density and temperature are just too high even for protons and neutrons to form, from which atoms can form in turn. However, the model postulates that there were quantum fluctuations which then became magnified to macroscopic size. The Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy at the quantum level allows 'virtual' pairs of photons and of matter and anti-matter 'particles' to be spontaneously created out of nothing and to annihilate one another even in so-called 'empty' space. As the astronomer Sandra Faber explains,

> This microscopic seething of the vacuum normally goes unnoticed because the fluctuations are short-lived; pairs appear and disappear quickly and on average have no measurable effect. Circumstances are essentially altered in inflation, however; now pairs are torn apart by the rapid expansion of space and, once separated, cannot find one another to annihilate. They therefore must become 'real', frozen into the fabric of the universe for all time. Their associated energy fluctuations are the tiny ripples – seized by inflation and blown up to what will ultimately become, in our day, galaxies and superclusters.[9]

Guth inferred from the fact that quantum fluctuations occur randomly with some probability that once inflation has been induced just after the Big Bang, it will continue producing an infinite number of 'bubble universes'. That suggests that there is an infinity of universes no longer in any causal connection with

9 Sandra Faber, http://www.counterbalance.org/cq-fab/abigb-frame.html (accessed 11 October 2020).

one another – which are therefore free to develop in different ways. With such a multiverse which lasts for ever "anything that can happen will happen, and it will happen an infinite number of times".[10] It is even suggested that in some of these other universes the laws of physics and fundamental constants might be different from those in our universe, making them very strange places indeed.

That speculation has elicited a challenge to the inflationary model. Paul Steinhardt, who was one of the original advocates of the inflationary model, has since turned against it. In a paper published in the *Scientific American* in 2011 he observed that "As the case for inflation has grown stronger, so has the case against".[11] He returned to argue more strongly against that model in another *Scientific American* article published in 2017, arguing that the whole notion of infinitely many universes eternally inflating has become unfalsifiable, and thus is an unscientific fantasy.[12] Not surprisingly, that last claim elicited an energetic rebuttal from defenders of inflation.

Steinhardt and others now advocate a quite different model which was first proposed in the 1930s, and then abandoned: that the universe we observe is just an expanding phase in a longer history of a universe which forever expands and contracts. According to this speculation, what is modelled as the Big Bang was actually a "Big Bounce", a transition from some preceding cosmological phase where the universe was contracting towards a singularity, but before reaching that singularity it 'bounced' to begin the present expanding phase.

However, even if other universes do exist, it is not possible to obtain any evidence which would confirm their existence, since any evidence would have to be detectable by us. To be detectable, that evidence would have causal relations with things in the universe in which we live, in which case that observed phenomenon would be part of *our* universe. Therefore there *never could* be any evidence of *another* universe. Speculation as to the existence of other universes is just that: speculation because it is not possible that such speculations could ever be confirmed by empirical evidence.

3 The Question of Whether the Universe Had a Beginning

There are some questions which intuitively seem reasonable, but which cannot be dealt with by physics for reasons determined by physics itself. When

10 John Moffat, *Cracking the Particle Code of the Universe: The Hunt for the Higgs Boson*, p. 187, n. 13, reports that Guth made this statement to journalist Mike Martin of United Press International at a cosmology conference in Boston on 23 March 2001.

11 Paul J. Steinhardt, 'The Inflation Debate', *Scientific American*, April 2011, pp. 36–43, at p. 42.

12 Anna Iijas, Paul J. Steinhardt, and Abraham Loeb, 'Pop Goes the Universe', *Scientific American*, January 2017, pp. 32–39, at p. 39.

the values assigned to the variables in the Friedmann equations are projected backwards in time, they approach the purely notional time 'zero' as the limit of that series. However, the time 'zero' is an artefact of the mathematics. It is not a real time because, as already mentioned, a consequence of the General Theory of Relativity is that space, time, energy, and matter are fused, so the limit of 'zero' which is approached ever closer by the series of values of the time variable is not a real time.

One consequence is that it is not possible to refer to that purely notional time as "the time when the universe began". Yet it seems to be a conceptual truth that anything has a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it did not exist. But the General Theory of Relativity implies that, because time began when the universe began, there was no previous time when the universe did not exist. So, it is often said that it 'makes no sense' to talk about the beginning of the universe.

It is not difficult to understand why it is not possible to refer to a time 'before' the universe began. But if there was no such time, it follows that the universe *cannot* be said to have a beginning. To invoke an Anselmian expression, it seems that it cannot be thought that the universe had a beginning. Yet, to insist that it 'makes no sense' to even wonder whether there was anything 'before' the universe began seems to be too strong, even if such speculations necessarily project beyond the domain describable by physics. For we count the passage of time by using the series of natural numbers, and they extend backwards from zero indefinitely. So, it is understandable why people keep asking: "What was 'before' the universe began?"

One cosmologist who is prepared to speak of the beginning of the universe is Alexander Vilenkin. In 2003 Arvind Borde, Alan Guth and he published a paper announcing a new theorem they had deduced from the equations of the General Theory of Relativity.[13] Vilenkin explains the import of the BGV theorem he helped construct:

> Loosely speaking, our theorem states that if the universe is, on average, expanding, then its history cannot be indefinitely continued into the past.... Inflation cannot be eternal and must have some sort of beginning.[14]

13 Borde, Arvind, Guth, Alan and Vilenkin, Alexander, 2003. 'Inflationary Spacetimes are Incomplete in Past Directions', *Physical Review Letters* 90, pp. 1–4.

14 Alexander Vilenkin, 'The Beginning of the Universe', *Physics*, Vol. 1:4 (2015); https://inference-review.com/article/the-beginning-of-the-universe (accessed 15 February 2021). He says that, "More precisely, if the average expansion rate is positive along a given world line, or geodesic, then this geodesic must terminate after a finite amount of time".

The qualification, "on average, expanding" in this theorem simply means that this theorem allows for some periods of contraction, but on average there is more expansion than contraction, so the volume of the universe increases with time. Vilenkin explains:

> Inflation cannot be eternal and must have some sort of a beginning. The BGV theorem is sweeping in its generality. It makes no assumptions about gravity or matter. Gravity may be attractive or repulsive, light rays may converge or diverge, and even general relativity may decline into desuetude: the theorem would still hold.[15]

He argues that the 'bouncing' cosmology advocated by Steinhardt and others is inconsistent with that theorem, and concludes:

> The answer to the question, "Did the universe have a beginning?" is, "It probably did". We have no viable models of an eternal universe. The BGV theorem gives us reason to believe that such models simply cannot be constructed.

However, for the reasons stated at the beginning of this section, that statement goes beyond what physics is able to describe. Despite being qualified as a probability, this is not a statement of physics, but of meta-physics.

4 The Emergence of Things in the Universe

It is known with a reasonable degree of certainty what the properties of the observable universe would have been some short time after the supposed singularity predicted by the cosmological equations generated by the General Theory of Relativity. The account of the evolution of the universe which has most acceptance today does not begin with the singularity which is an artefact of the equations. There is no way that either basic physics or astronomy can tell what was happening in the period from the purely notional value: 0 to 10^{-43} seconds.

That period is referred to as the Planck epoch, named in honour of the physicist Max Planck who proposed in 1900 that energy is radiated in very minute and discrete quantized amounts. It is often said that in the Planck epoch, the currently known laws of physics no longer apply. It is surmised that at that time

15 Vilenkin, 'The Beginning of the Universe'.

the four fundamental forces – the electromagnetic force, the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, and the gravitational force – were unified. However, although speculations about what might have been happening during the Planck period abound, they too are unverifiable speculations. Anything before the time when the oldest data which can be obtained by astronomical observation – including the postulated initial singularity, or some other form of 'creation event' – necessarily remains uncertain, and beyond the purview of physics.

During the following period, called the 'grand unification epoch', it is surmised that gravitation separated from the other forces as the temperature of the universe fell. The universe was pure energy at this stage, too hot for any particles to exist. At 10^{-37} seconds is the moment when the proposed inflationary period began, if it did. It is proposed that a quark-gluon plasma emerged after inflation ended, as well as other elementary 'particles'.[16]

After about 10^{-11} seconds, the picture becomes less speculative, since particle energies drop to values that can be attained today in 'particle' accelerators. The first 'particles' to emerge were protons and neutrons, and the first atomic nuclei to emerge were ions of deuterium and helium. Despite its unquestioned importance in the evolution of the early universe, the ion of helium would have been the first to appear as the temperature of the early universe began to cool to below 4,000 degrees Kelvin, but until recently it has eluded unequivocal detection in interstellar space.

This ion had been reproduced in a laboratory as long ago as 1925, but only in the late 1970s was there any serious discussion of the possibility that this ion might exist in local astrophysical plasmas, but the telescopes at the time were unable to detect it. However, it was announced in April 2019 that astrophysicists have detected for the first time a molecule of that type.[17] Its detection vindicates the theory Alpher developed in his 1948 dissertation.

As the universe continued to cool, it eventually reached a temperature where electrons were able to combine with nuclei to form neutral atoms. Before this 'recombination' occurred, the Universe would have been opaque because the free electrons would have caused light (photons) to scatter just as sunlight scatters from the water droplets in clouds. But when the free electrons were absorbed to form neutral atoms, the Universe suddenly became transparent.

16 Although the word "particle" is widely used to refer to quantum-level phenomena, strictly speaking, what is described in the so-called Standard Model of particle physics are not *particles* at all; they are quantized nodes in a quantum field.

17 Rolf Güsten et al, 'Astrophysical detection of the helium hydride ion HeH^+', *Nature*, 568 (2019), pp. 357–59, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1090-x (accessed 22 October 2019).

Those same photons, often called 'the afterglow of the Big Bang' are the cosmic background radiation observed today.

It seems that the first stars began forming about 250 million light years after the Big Bang. In May 2018 a team of astronomers working at the ALMA radio telescope located in northern Chile announced the detection of faint signals of ionized oxygen emitted when the universe was less than four per cent of its present age with a redshift which was precisely determined. The authors report: "This precisely determined redshift indicates that the red rest-frame optical colour arises from a dominant stellar component that formed about 250 million years after the Big Bang".[18] It has taken light emitted from it as long as that to reach the planet Earth. There might be objects farther away, but at present there is no way to see them.

For our purposes, there is no need to trace the history of the universe in more detail. I finish this review by remarking that what is often and loosely called 'the Big Bang theory' is a set of interrelated theories encompassing general relativity, quantum field theory, ordinary Newtonian dynamics, thermodynamics, statistical physics, fluid dynamics and more, which have been well tested in laboratories and/or by observing naturally occurring phenomena. Strictly speaking, it is not a set of theories about the *origin* of the universe; it is a set of well-confirmed theories maintained as an explanation of the phenomena observed in the present. It postulates that in the distant past the universe had to be extremely hot and dense, but what happened in the first picosecond remains a mystery. Indeed, how long that initial state lasted is not known.

5 Inferring the First Premise of a Cosmological Reformulation of Anselm's Proof

This review of the developments of modern cosmology has yielded what is needed for showing how Anselm's proof of the existence of God can be reformulated on a cosmological basis. For it is evident beyond reasonable doubt that everything which is observable in the universe has come into existence at some finite time in the past. That is implied by the BGV theorem, whether or not it is inferred from that theorem that the universe itself had a beginning, and it is confirmed by the narrative of how the current universe evolved.

There is no need to consider here the issues being debated between the advocates of cosmological inflation and 'the Big Bounce', nor the even more

18 Takuya Hashimoto et al, 'The Onset of Star Formation 250 Years After the Big Bang', *Nature*, 557, published 16 May 2018.

extreme speculations of multiverses, superstrings, and such like. For we cannot have any scientifically-based knowledge about anything which is not observable.

The fundamental point is that the considerations which are relevant to reformulating Anselm's proof has been established, irrespective of the outcome of those disputes. For this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof will begin with the most pervasive fact of all. For it is as certain as anything which science can establish, that it is a *fact* that:

(1) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

Asserting this fact as the first premise of the reformulation of Anselm's proof of the existence of God will provide it with a logically contingent, but undeniable, factual basis. For it is indisputable that all the things which are observable in the universe began to exist some time ago. Not only is that implied by modern cosmological theory, we know from our own experience, and from evidence we see daily, that innumerably many things used to exist, but no longer exist. And we have reasonable grounds to believe that some things which have never existed, and do not exist now, will come to exist in the future, because that is the experience of everyone currently alive.

The premise (1) is true whether or not the universe had an absolute beginning, or emerged from some prior event which is beyond the reach of any accessible evidence. It is compatible with – but does not imply – the proposition that the universe itself had a beginning. But if the universe *did* have an absolute beginning, which Vilenkin deems to be probable, that would entail (1). However (1) asserts all that is required to serve as the foundation of the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof which I will articulate and argue for in the following nine chapters.

This simple premise suffices to prove the conclusions of both Anselm's Stage One and Stage Two, together with the two premises which were distilled in §3.3 from Anselm's explanation in *Reply* VIII how it is possible to think of something than which nothing greater could be thought. We now have in hand a plausible explanatory definition of "greater than" and the premise implicit in that explanation, namely "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good".

Anselm begins his three-stage proof by imagining in *Proslogion* II that when he says aloud the phrase "*something than which nothing greater could be thought*", the Fool has heard what Anselm has spoken of. But that is not where Anselm's reasoning actually begins. For, as I said in the introduction to this chapter, his first premise is backed by the explanation he provides in *Reply* VIII

of how any rational mind can infer that concept. Anselm then argues that even the Fool is bound to concede that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is 'in the understanding'. He can argue that only because he has already in his own thinking ascended from comparing one good thing with another to the summit where he himself has inferred that concept.

So, when Anselm says that something which begins, but does not cease, is better than something which has a beginning and an end, he is inviting us to consider something which, with respect to its existence, is better than anything which has both a beginning and an end. He then submits that something which does not have either a beginning or an end is even better, for there would be *no* time when it does not exist. He then suggests that that which is in no way in need, nor is thought to be changed or to be moved, is very much better than it.

So, beginning this cosmological reformulation of his proof with the premise (1) is beginning where Anselm's own thinking takes off from all the observable things which exist at some time in the universe. I am not claiming that the argument I am about to present is the *same* as the argument which Anselm wrote in the *Proslogion*. For I am deliberately replacing Stage One of his proof with the argument below. Nor am I claiming that it is better. But I am claiming that, although I begin with a premise different from the one with which he begins, his first premise is itself the product of a mental ascent which takes off from the same facts about the universe as he did.

I must point out, at the outset, that this cosmological argument is very different from those arguments which attempt to infer that God exists from asserting that the universe did have a beginning. One way the revamped First Cause argument has been formulated goes as follows:

(a) Everything which begins to exist has a cause of its existence;
(b) The universe began to exist;
(c) Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence;
(d) No scientific explanation (in terms of physical laws) can provide a causal account of the origin (that is, of the very beginning) of the universe;
(e) Therefore, the cause of the beginning of the universe must be personal (that is, an explanation is given in terms of a personal agent).[19]

19 William Lane Craig & Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, ch. 1. Richard Swinburne has presented a similar argument in *The Existence of God?*, 2nd Edition.

I do not find any argument of that form acceptable. The first premise derives its plausibility from the fact that we observe multitudes of phenomena which are caused to exist. The apparent necessity of that premise is grounded in the First law of Thermodynamics, which says that energy is conserved in all interactions. Since the expenditure of energy is required to make anything happen, the required amount of energy must have come from something else. So whatever happens has a cause.

However, we have seen that it is problematic to assert the premise (b). It is even more problematic to assert the premise (c). If the universe did have a cause of its existence, as (c) says, its being caused to exist could not be causal in the same sense as is asserted in (a). The reason why not is because, *ex hypothesi*, it has been assumed that causation of the energy-conserving sort is about to begin, but has not yet begun. For, as has been noted above, the indeterminacy which characterizes the false vacuum rules out the possibility of causation. Whether the universe has a cause of some sort different from the forms of causation we observe is a question which *necessarily* physics cannot answer.

6 Existing Contingently

In adopting the premise (1) as the foundation upon which to build this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, I am following the precedent Anselm set in the arguments in *Reply* 1. For those arguments establish his Stage One conclusion, based not on the proposition that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, but rather on the logical features of contingent existence: existing with a beginning, and being able not to exist. Those arguments will be examined in the following chapter where it will be shown that those arguments are validated by the premises of this cosmological argument.

The obvious question is: What follows from the premise (1)? In Aristotelian logic, which was the only system of predicate logic in Anselm's time, propositions of the form "Every S is P" imply a proposition of the form "Some S is P". But in the modern system of logic invented by Frege and rectified by Whitehead and Russell, universal propositions are expressed as hypotheticals: "If anything is S, it is P", which does not imply that anything is S. So, to assert the same statement in this modern system of logic, (1) would have to be rendered as:

(1*) Some observable things exist in the universe, and any observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

Since I am presenting an Anselmian argument, I propose to interpret (1) as a universal proposition which implies that some individual thing which is observable exists in the universe and, consequently, has a beginning. But if this argument were to be expressed in the formal symbolism of modern logic, then the first premise would have to be a formalization of (1*). The argument is valid whichever way (1) is expressed.

Someone who is not familiar with the implications of modern cosmology might think that it is obvious that existing with a beginning can be defined by the following conceptual truth:

> Anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but does not exist at any time before some previous time.

However, because the current cosmological model of the universe is built on the General Theory of Relativity, it incorporates the fusion of space, time, matter, and energy. Consequently, there is a consensus amongst cosmologists and astrophysicists that it is not possible to infer from the probability that the universe itself had a beginning that there was a time when the universe did not exist. But since it is *possible* that the universe had a beginning, what otherwise appears to be a conceptual truth must be qualified. That is one of the curious anomalies in modern cosmological theory, and is a telling example of how the findings of physical science impinge on meta-physics.

This problem does not arise, however, with respect to whatever exists *in* the universe at some time. Since it took so long before even the first atoms emerged, everything which is observable in the universe began to exist some considerable time after the universe began expanding. It is not only possible, but necessary, to acknowledge that for each thing which now exists in the universe, there was a time when it did not exist. So, the suggested definition of having a beginning can be accepted as universally true, *provided* it is qualified by setting aside the universe as a whole. With that qualification, the purported definition above can be reformulated as:

> (2) Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

Because modern cosmology is built not only on the General Theory of Relativity, but also on the astronomical observations which indicate that the universe is expanding, it is an empirically based theory. That constraining condition is based on what has been discovered *a posteriori*. Since any proper definition

is true *a priori*, but (2) is qualified by a consequence of an empirically-based theory, I call (2) a "quasi-definition".

It follows from (1) and (2), by *modus ponens*, that:

(3) Every observable thing which exists in the universe exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

The argument I am about to articulate will deduce from (3) that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought also exists. For the fact that all the myriads of things which exist in the universe do not exist at some other time provides an uncontroversial base upon which to build a cosmological Stage One argument which is Anselmian in character. From that basis it is possible to deduce a factual premise which will enable, in turn, the deduction of Anselm's Stage One conclusion, that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

Because anything which exists in the universe does not exist at some time, there is nothing problematic about comparing how anything is at a time when it exists with what would be the case when it does not exist. That comparison can be made without contradiction. For it is a conceptual truth that:

(4) Anything both exists and does not exist if, and only if, it exists at some time, and does not exist at some other time.

That is quite a startling proposition, because it asserts that there is a condition which is pervasive throughout the universe, but is apparently contradictory. For there are hosts of things which used to exist, but exist no more, and there are hosts of things which exist now, but at some time in the past did not. And we have a strong inductive reason to believe that what exists now will cease to exist at some time in the future. So unlike Anselm's comparison in *Proslogion* II, what is being compared here are two *actual* situations which can be extracted from (3) and are true of each thing observable in the universe.

7 What Exists Contingently Is Greater When It Exists than When It Does Not

It is undeniable that we can refer to and describe things which do not exist at the time of speaking because we have relevant knowledge of what they were. For example, my father is no longer alive, so he does not exist anymore. But I can describe him and report truly many facts about him. My father is still

my father, and I am still able to describe what was distinctive about him when he was alive.

We call the existence of a thing "contingent" if it is both able to exist and able not to exist. It follows from (3) that every observable thing that exists in the universe at some time exists contingently. The argument I am about to develop requires a simple point. Consider something – indeed, anything – which exists contingently. We can refer to it, and describe it, even if it does not exist at the current time. What we are referring to and describing is the very same thing as that which *did* exist at some time. The predicates which describe *what* anything is – what Kant called it 'determining' predicates – are the same whether or not it exists at the time it is being described. That is why I incorporate Kant's notion of a 'determining predicate' in the definition of "greater than" which I proposed in §3.3.[20]

In Stage One Anselm compares something which he supposes to be *only* in the understanding with how *that same thing* would be if it were in reality, as can be thought, and says that the latter "is greater". That comment is validated in Appendix A by invoking the definition of "greater than" and the premise "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good", which I introduced in §3.3. All those observable things which exist in the universe at some time, but not at other times, are simply examples of that same contrast between existing and not existing. So the same definition of "greater than" may be invoked here:

(5) Anything x is greater than anything y if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe y are mutually realizable and are true of x, and some positive and primitive predicate F, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of x but not of y.

Of course, a vast number of the descriptions which are true of something when it exists are not true of it at those times when it does not exist. But that is not relevant here. This argument can be kept simple by restricting our

20 It might be objected, for example, that the predicate 'is alive' is not the same predicate as 'was alive', or that tensed verbs may be replaced by verbs indexed to different dates, so they are not the same predicates. But that objection is not effective. The logic of tensed sentences can be consistently explicated with all predicates in the present tense and using temporal operators like 'It was the case that', and 'It will be the case that' to express past and future situations, as Arthur Prior has demonstrated (*Time and Modality* 1957; *Past, Present and Future* 1967; *Papers on Time and Tense* 1968, *Papers on Time and Tense* 2nd expanded edn, ed. Braüner, T., Copeland, B.J., Hasle, P. and Øhrstrøm, P. (2003). Invoking dates as an index only appears to eliminate tenses; dates implicitly refer to the present time, because the year '0' was fixed by a monk named Dionysius Exiguus who *mis*calculated that Jesus Christ was born 553 years previously.

consideration to just one significant difference between the two opposed situations being compared: that the same thing which exists at one time does not exist at some other time.

Now, the definition of "greater than", (5), includes a criterion which requires that, in order for *x* to be greater than *y*, a positive and primitive non-determining predicate which describes something it is good to be, is true of *x*, but not of *y*. The examination in §2.5 of the passage in *Reply* VIII where Anselm explains how it is possible to conceive something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought showed that he claims that it is better to exist than not to exist. I then endorsed in §3.3 Kant's thesis that "exists" is not a 'real predicate', that is, it is not a predicate which adds a further determination to the concept of a thing (a *res*). Putting those two points together, I proposed that Anselm is implicitly invoking this further premise:

(6) *Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.

To repeat, I submit that there is close to universal agreement amongst all peoples, in all cultures, that other things being equal, to exist is good. That assessment is evident in the joy people express at the birth of a baby, the grief they express when someone dies, the universal condemnation of murder as a crime, the desire to preserve wilderness, the reaction of horror at wanton destruction, and many, many other everyday judgements. Even animals instinctively fight or flee to preserve their own lives.

It follows from the definition of "greater than", (5), that:

(7) Anything is greater at some time than at some other time if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe it when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it exists, and "exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, and which is true of it when it exists, but not when it does not exist.

Now, it is a logical truth that:

(8) If anything exists at some time, but not at some other time, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe it when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist.

That is a logical truth because anything which exists at some time, but not at some other time, is identified by what is true of it when it exists. Of course, the predicate "does not exist" is not true of it when it exists, but that is a *negative*

predicate. Furthermore, the fact that a thing exists at some time demonstrates that it is manifestly true that all the positive and primitive predicates which describe it are mutually realizable. That is true of anything which exists. It is certainly true of countless things in the universe. Indeed, when anything exists it is truly described by a great many more predicates than those positive predicates which describe it when it does not exist. So, (8) is a valid instantiation of the first condition in (7).

One consequence of (8) is that there could not be any predicate which describes something which no longer exists, or does not yet exist, but which implies that this thing itself is *better* when it does not exist than when it does exist. That is obviously true. Of course, there are some things which are so nasty that we judge that *the world* would be better off without them. But that is not the same as saying that *the thing itself* would be better if it does not exist than if it does.

Now, it follows from (3) and (8), by *modus ponens*, that:

(9) All the positive, primitive predicates which describe every observable thing which exists in the universe when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist.

(9) satisfies the first condition in (7).

As for the second condition, I have already argued that Kant was right to reject all the Cartesian ontological arguments on the ground that "exists" is not a determining predicate. For if 'exists' were a determining predicate, what exists at some time would not be the same thing which is referred to and described at a time when it does not exist because those predicates which determine *what* it is would not be the same. But that is absurd. Furthermore, the predicate "exists" is not only a positive predicate, but it is also a primitive predicate because it cannot be defined in terms of any other more primitive predicates. So, it is also a logical truth that:

(10) "Exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, and which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.

Conjoining (6) and (10), yields:

(11) "Exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate but which it is good to be, and which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.

So, the second condition in (7) is also satisfied. There is no shortage of instances in the universe which exemplify this truth.

Since both the conditions in (7) have now been satisfied, conjoining (9) and (11) yields:

> (12) All the positive, primitive predicates which describe every observable thing which exists in the universe when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist, and "exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate but which it is good to be and which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.

(12) has been deduced from the premises (1), (2), and (6) and satisfies the two conditions prescribed in (7) for anything to be greater when it exists than when it does not exist. So, it follows from (7) and (12), by *modus ponens*, that:

> (13) Every observable thing which exists in the universe is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

It follows from (4) and (13), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

> (14) Whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

This universal proposition (14) implies two significant consequences. Firstly, (14) is similar to a proposition which Anselm deduces in *Proslogion* II. But whereas Anselm's comment there, "which is greater", is about a particular thing – that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – (14) is about *whatever* exists at some time, but not at some other times.

Secondly, instead of comparing something which is only in the understanding with its being also in reality, as can be thought, (14) has been derived from comparing all those observable things which exist in the universe at some time with themselves when they do not exist at some other time, without even mentioning 'the understanding'.

8 Deducing Anselm's Stage One Conclusions

In order that the conclusion of the argument I am about to articulate is the same as the conclusion of Anselm's Stage One, (14) must be expressed in terms

of being in reality, not in terms of existing. It was noted in §3.5 that Anselm expressed his Stage One argument using the latter terminology so that it was explicit that what is at issue is the binary conception of existence. So, he is implicitly adopting, as a conceptual truth, that:

(15) Anything is in reality if, and only if, it exists.

To transpose (14) into that terminology, it may be inferred from (14) and (15), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(16) Whatever is in reality at some times, but is not in reality at some other times, is greater at those times when it is in reality than it is at those times when it is not in reality.

We have seen in §3.5 that Anselm introduces the singular referring expression "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" in Stage One as an arbitrary instance of *anything*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, because he takes seriously both his own declaration of what 'we believe', and the Fool's denial "There is not a god". For it follows from those two beliefs that anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality. From that supposition he deduces in Stage One that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the understanding and in reality.

Since I am setting aside Anselm's Stage One argument, the following argument will establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality in a different way. Nevertheless, we can still accept Anselm's supposition that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought is not in reality, since his question, "Is there not anything of such a nature?", is the question addressed both by Anselm's original Stage One and this reformulation of it. Instantiating (16) yields:

(17) If that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, but is not in reality at some other times, it is greater at those times when it is in reality than it is at those times when it is not in reality.

It might be objected that that inference assumes that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, at least at some times, whereas the question Anselm is addressing is whether it is in reality *at all*. So, it could be objected, to infer (17) is seriously to beg the question.

That objection would be effective if the argument which follows were to deduce its conclusion from the supposition that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is indeed in reality at some times. But (17) is a hypothetical proposition; it does not *assert* that that thing is in reality at any time. It will be seen shortly that all this argument requires is that it *can be thought* that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

Rather than supposing that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought *is* in reality at some times, let us suppose that:

(18) There are times when that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality.

That assumption will have to be discharged in due course. It follows from (17) and (18), by *modus ponens*, that:

(19) If that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, then it is greater at the times when it is in reality than it is at some other times.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (19) yields:

(20) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, then it can be thought to be greater at some times than it is at some other times.

Now, it has been shown in §3.4 that it is a conceptual truth that:

(21) It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

It follows from (15) and (21), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(22) It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

Because the subject of (22) is an indefinite description, to infer anything from (22) it is necessary to introduce an assumption which is the same as (22), but has as its subject a singular term which is an exemplar of the subject of (22).

Since that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has been introduced as a representative of *anything*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, it may be assumed that:

(23) It is possible that *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

That assumption will also have to be discharged in due course. Applying Anselm's Conceivability Rule to (23), yields:

(24) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

Since it has now been established that it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, it can be thought that it is in reality at least at some times. So, it follows from (20) and (24), by *modus ponens*, that:

(25) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is greater at some times than it is at some other times.

(25) is equivalent to:

(26) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not as great at some times than it is at some other times.

However, it is a logical truth that:

(27) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not as great at some times than it is at some other times, then it is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

The antecedent of (27) has already been deduced on line (26). So, it follows from (26) and (27), by *modus ponens*, that:

(28) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

Now, (28) has been deduced from the assumption (18). So, it follows from (18) and (28), by Conditional Proof, that:

(29) If there are times when that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

That discharges the assumption (18). However, the consequent of (29) is not possible. For it is a logical truth that:

(30) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

So, it follows from (29) and (30), by *modus tollens*, that:

(31) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality at some times.

Since "It is not possible that … not …" is equivalent to: "It is necessary that …", (31) is equivalent to:

(32) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *always* in reality.

Generalizing the subject of (32) yields:

(33) It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.

That conclusion has been deduced from (14), which was deduced in §4.7, and the assumption (23). The subject of that assumption was introduced as an exemplar of the subject of (22), which has been deduced from the conceptual truth (21). The other assumption in this deduction, (18), has already been discharged in inferring (29) and negated on line (31). Now, (33) does not mention *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, nor is that thing mentioned in any of the premises upon which (33) depends. So, (33) may be reaffirmed as a conclusion entailed by (14) and (21), which is a conceptual truth.

(34) It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.

But (14) was itself deduced from the two cosmological premises (1) and (2), together with (5), the definition of "greater than" and (6), the implicit premise

that "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good". So, (34) is dependent only upon the premises: (1), (2), (5), and (6).

It is a recognized rule of inference that it is valid to infer from "It is necessary that *p*" that "*p*". So it may validly be inferred from (34) that:

(35) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *always* in reality.

So Anselm's Stage One conclusion – with "in the understanding and" deleted – has been validly deduced from those four premises. Lest anyone demur at the additional word "always" appearing in (34) and (35) when it does not appear in Anselm Stage One conclusion, I point out that Anselm himself endorses the inclusion of that word. For, we have already seen in §3.4, he extends that conclusion, arguing in *Reply* 1 that "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists *always and everywhere as a totality*".

There is an interesting corollary which follows directly from this argument. Since (3) says that "Every observable thing which exists in the universe exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist", it follows from (3) and (35), by *modus tollens*, that:

(36) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* one of the observable things which exist in the universe.

That will prove to be a significant conclusion.

9 Deducing a Stronger Version of Anselm's Stage One Conclusion

Although the argument articulated in §4.6 to §4.8 is based on a premise different from Anselm's, I deliberately kept its argumentative strategy as close to his as possible. However, it is possible to extend that argument to deduce an even stronger conclusion than (34). In §4.7 the argument proceeded by comparing a representative of all those observable things which exist at some time, with itself when at some other time that same thing does not exist. Similarly, the argument which follows will proceed by comparing that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with itself under the alternative suppositions that it is *unable* not to exist and that it is *able* not to exist.

Now, it was deduced in §4.6 above that:

(3) Every observable thing which exists in the universe exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

Generalizing the subject of (3), it follows from (3) that:

(37) Something exists which does not exist at some time.

Now, it is a logical truth, implied by the rule for Inferring Possibility, that:

(38) Whatever does not exist is able not to exist.

The contrapositive of (38) is equivalent to (38) and therefore is also a logical truth, namely:

(39) Whatever is unable not to exist exists.

Conjoining (37) and (39) yields:

(40) Whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time.

Now, it was deduced in §4.7 above that:

(14) Whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

Conjoining (14) and (40) yields:

(41) Whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time, and whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

It is a logical truth that:

(42) If whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time, and whatever both exists and does not

exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist, then whatever is unable not to exist is greater than whatever is able not to exist.[21]

Since the antecedent of (42) is the same as (41), it follows from (41) and (42) by *modus ponens*, that:

(43) Whatever is unable not to exist is greater than whatever is able not to exist.

Having deduced (43), it may be instantiated. Doing so yields:

(44) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were unable not to exist, it would be greater than if it were able not to exist.

(44) is equivalent to:

(45) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were *able* not to exist, it would not be as great as it would be if it were *unable* not to exist.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (45) yields:

(46) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *able* not to exist, it can be thought that it would not be as great as it would be if it were *unable* not to exist.

Generalizing the consequent of (46) yields:

(47) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist, it can be thought that *something* is greater than it.

But the rule of Double Negation implies that it is a logical truth that:

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21 That (42) is a logical truth has been validated by running the following formula on Tree Proof Generator (umsu.de/[∀x(¬◇¬Fx→Fx) ∧ ∃x∃y(Fx∧¬Fy) ∧ ∀x∀y((Fx∧¬Fy)→Rxy)] → (∀x∀y(¬◇¬Fx∧◇¬Fy)→Rab)), when "F" is read as "exists" and "R" is read as "is greater than":

((∀x(¬◇¬Fx → Fx) ∧ (∃x∃y(Fx ∧ ¬Fy) ∧ ∀x∀y((Fx ∧ ¬Fy) → Rxy))) → (∀x∀y(¬◇¬Fx∧◇¬Fy)→Rab))

(48) If it can be thought that something is greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, then that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (47) and (48), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(49) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist, then that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

But, as was asserted above in §4.8, it is logical truth that:

(30) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

It therefore follows from (30) and (49), by *modus tollens*, that:

(50) It cannot be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *able* not to exist.

It follows from (50), by the contrapositive of Anselm's Conceivability rule, that:

(51) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist.

Since, as has been observed in §4.8, "It is necessary that …" is equivalent to "It is not possible that … not …", (51) is equivalent to:

(52) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

Generalizing the subject of (52) yields:

(53) It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

That is the conclusion which this argument has been designed to establish. (53) is an extraordinarily strong proposition, for it asserts that a necessity is necessarily true.

Each of those necessities implies a weaker proposition. For it follows from (53), by the rule that "If it is necessary that *p*, then *p*", that:

(54) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

By that same rule it follows from (54) that:

(55) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

Anselm's Stage One conclusion was proven on line (34). His Stage One conclusion has now been proven again, but without any reference to time, on line (55). So, the conclusion of Stage One, and that that conclusion is a necessary truth, have now been proven twice directly from the premises (1), (2), (5), and (6), as well as indirectly when Anselm's first argument in *Reply* I is justified by those same premises. None of these deductions invoke the controversial predicate, "is in the understanding".

A reader might well wonder why I have presented this stronger proof, since it appears to be redundant. In particular, why go to the trouble of constructing this stronger proof when the conclusion on line (55) has already been proven on line (34) with an insignificant difference in wording?

The reason is that this second proof provides a *stronger explanation* of the truth of Anselm's Stage One conclusion than is provided by simply deducing (34). Both the proof Anselm himself presented in *Proslogion* II, and the one in §4.6 to §4.8 above deduce that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality from a contradiction generated by supposing that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality. That is quite sufficient to demonstrate that that conclusion is necessarily true.

However, the proof of (53) not only demonstrates that the conclusion deduced on lines (34) and (55) is true, but it also shows *why* that conclusion is necessarily true. The reason why something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists is that its nature is such that it is unable not to exist. What that expression really means is that whatever is unable not to exist exists with such power [*potestas*] that nothing could ever prevent it from existing or cause it not to exist, Thus, this stronger proof of (53) validly demonstrates *the ontological ground* which underlies both Anselm's proof in *Proslogion* II and the proof in §4.6 to §4.8.

I hesitated before asserting that previous sentence because I can imagine some critic retorting: "Aha! So this is an ontological argument after all!" But such a retort would be too slick by half. The label, "the ontological argument" was first attached by Kant to those *a priori* arguments for the existence of God

presented by Descartes, Leibniz, and their 18th Century followers. Neither of the arguments I have presented above are 'ontological' in that sense, since they rely on the factual premise (1) which is not *a priori*. It is unfortunate that Kant chose this label since this second cosmological argument is 'ontological' in a quite different sense. In this section, Anselm's Stage One conclusion (55) has been derived from establishing that the *mode of existence* of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is such that it is unable not to exist.

10 Comparing Anselm's Stage One Argument with This Cosmological Reformulation

When we compare these two cosmological versions of Stage One to what Anselm himself wrote in *Proslogion* II, three notable features stand out.

The *first* and most obvious difference between Anselm's original Stage One argument in *Proslogion* II and both these arguments is the difference in starting point. Anselm's own argument begins with the imagined events of his uttering his belief, and being overheard by the Fool. From that he argues that even the Fool is bound to concede that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the understanding.

However, Anselm does not rely on what he says about the Fool's understanding to justify his supposing that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding. For Anselm himself is the one who utters the indefinite description, "something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought", and he certainly understands what he is speaking of. Consequently, he differentiates himself from the Fool, altering the wording of that descriptive phrase, to establish that he is entitled to assume that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding. That assumption is legitimated by the unremarkable fact that he understands what he is talking about.

Because the cosmological argument in §4.6 to §4.8 above is based upon the implications of confirmed facts, and the deduction of its conclusion is valid, it has been demonstrated that *it is a fact* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality because it is unable not to exist. Some readers might be startled to read such a claim. This cosmological reformulation of Stage One argument has established the very same conclusion which Anselm's original Stage One was designed to establish – that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality – but in a much stronger form. But here that conclusion is entailed by the fact that everything which exists in the universe has a beginning. That is why that conclusion is also a fact.

The *second* notable feature is that neither of these arguments depend upon anything being in the understanding, nor is it entangled with the complexities

of determining which inferences remain valid when arguing within intentional contexts, and which do not. Instead, they begin with, and rely upon, a simple premise about what exists in the universe, while still responding to the question which Anselm has asked himself: "Is there not anything of such a nature?"

In his version of Stage One in *Proslogion* II, Anselm compares that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought under two different circumstances:

(*a*) When it is in only the understanding; and
(*b*) When it is also in reality, as can be thought.

Anselm's comparison in the *Proslogion* involves difficult issues to do with the ontological status of concepts, and how what is thought relates to what is in reality. That has led many a commentator to allege that Anselm is committed to mental entities existing in the understanding. I do not think that Anselm is necessarily so committed, but in any case that issue does not arise in this reformulation of his proof. Moreover, while what is being compared in the deduction of (14) are the two states which are true of any observable thing which exists in the universe at some time, the fact that the argument in §4.9 also entails that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists shows that the reference to times in §4.6 to §4.8 is not essential to the necessary existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Most significantly, however, Anselm's original Stage One argument is vulnerable to the objection levelled against it by many critics: that he is purporting to infer the existence of something from purely thinking of it. I have argued that those difficulties are not fatal, but none of them are even relevant to these two cosmological reformulations of Anselm's Stage One. We have here arguments which are closely parallel to Anselm's, and which prove the same conclusion, but bypass the stumbling-block which so many find in his original version. Nor, significantly, is the proof of the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought conditional upon the clause, "If it can be thought" as Anselm qualified the three Stage One conclusions he deduced in *Reply* I, as will be seen in the following chapter.

On the other hand, both versions of Stage One presented above are based on comparing everything which exists in the universe, under the two opposite circumstances:

(*c*) When it exists at some time; and
(*d*) When it does not exist at some other time, as can be thought at any time.

The comparison of (*c*) and (*d*) is quite straightforward and unproblematic, since those two conditions are satisfied by myriads of things in the universe.

The *third* notable feature is that it is not possible to classify either of the arguments proven above as versions of 'the ontological argument'. For in that form of argument, all the premises are supposed to be *analytically true*, or at least, *true a priori*. In stark contrast to the original Stage One of Anselm's proof, the reformulated version of the Stage One presented above is based upon the implications of confirmed cosmological facts the truth of which has been established *a posteriori*. For they are confirmed by the empirical evidence which indicates that the universe is expanding. It will be seen that that premise functions as the basis for all three stages of this reformulation of Anselm's proof.

Despite the differences between Anselm's actual argument in *Proslogion* II and those in this chapter, I submit that the argumentation above is thoroughly Anselmian. It deploys his indefinite description; many inferences are legitimated by his Conceivability rules; it employs his argumentative strategies; and it establishes his Stage One conclusions in a more plausible and less contentious way.

That surely throws doubt upon the classification of his Stage One argument as an 'ontological argument' of the kind attacked by Kant. My long-held belief that had Anselm known of Kant's discussion of the 'ontological argument', he would have rejected the allegation that his argument was of that type, is reinforced by the two ways above of deducing his Stage One conclusion. The fact that the same conclusions can be deduced, using the same argumentative strategies, without taking a detour through the understanding, indicates that the force of his argument is based on deeper considerations than his inferring that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding.

Another feature which both these alternative Stage One arguments share with Anselm's version in *Proslogion* II is that they too satisfy the dialectical requirement that any argument which sets out to refute a stated opinion must start by establishing common ground with the relevant opponent. There can be no doubt that this argument is based on factual evidence, which no-one who denies that God exists can reasonably deny, and yet the train of reasoning which follows from that premise transcends its own starting point. For this argument deduces that it is *necessary* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality and is unable not to exist from the existence of contingent beings. It is striking that the argument in §4.6 to §4.8 concludes by demonstrating that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* one of the myriads of things which exist contingently in the universe.

What Anselm's three-stage proof of the existence of God in *Proslogion* II and III requires of Stage One is that it be proven that "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists". For, as I asserted in §1.6 and shall justify in Chapter 6, that proposition both entails his Stage Two premise, and is what justifies his including the words "so truly exist that" in the conclusion of Stage Two. That proposition has been proven in this chapter on line (34) as "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *always* in reality" and in an even stronger form on line (53) as "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist". That shows that the underlying force of his proof is not derived from inferring that something is in reality from its being in the understanding, but from the ontological implications of his so-called formula, his innovative Conceivability rule of inference, and his grounding of what can be thought upon what is in reality.

CHAPTER 5

Three Arguments Vindicating Anselm's Inferring Reality from Thought

As mentioned in §1.1, soon after the *Proslogion* was published, it elicited a critical commentary, called *What Someone Might Respond on Behalf of the Fool*, which, according to tradition, was composed by a monk named Gaunilo. Gaunilo was the first of a countless number of critics who have objected to the argument which Anselm had presented in *Proslogion* II. Anselm soon wrote a *Reply*, in which he rebuts Gaunilo's criticisms, and restates his Stage One and Stage Two arguments in ways markedly different from those he presented in the *Proslogion*.

In the previous chapter it was shown that Anselm's Stage One argument in *Proslogion* II could be reformulated by deducing its conclusion from the premise:

(1) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

The very first argument which Anselm presented in his *Reply* to Gaunilo's critique of his Stage One argument is likewise formulated in terms of existing with a beginning. He concludes from it "If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, of necessity it exists". This argument shows that the cosmological reformulations presented in the previous chapter accords with his own reasoning.

Anselm then presents two more arguments which I interpret as the two legs of a well-recognized form of argument called a "Constructive Dilemma". In both legs of this dilemma Anselm's argument turns on the implications of existing contingently, for in each he considers something which does not exist but is able to exist. So, this dilemma also shows that Anselm is operating with the same concepts as were deployed in Chapter 4.

It is all too easy to interpret these arguments as simply alternative Stage One arguments. But I surmise that Anselm has a more focussed reason for beginning his *Reply* by presenting these arguments. All three establish the same conclusion: "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist" as conditional upon "If it can be thought". That indicates that he is engaging head on with Gaunilo's main objection, which is endorsed by so

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many modern critics, that it is never valid to infer that something is in reality from its being in thought. For he demonstrates that, in the special case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, if it can be thought, it is unable not to exist.

In this chapter it will be shown that Anselm's demonstrations of the validity of inferring that this thing is unable not to exist, *if it can be thought*, can itself be vindicated by embedding them in our cosmological reformulation of his proof. For it will be shown that the same four premises which entail the conclusion of Stage One in Chapter 4 also entail the conclusion of three arguments which Anselm presents in *Reply* I.

1 The Argument Based on Beginning to Exist

Anselm begins his *Reply* to Gaunilo with a quick summary of Gaunilo's objections and a restatement of what he had claimed to have proven in *Proslogion* II. He then cites what he takes to be Gaunilo's core objection:

> *You think that it does not follow from the fact that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be understood that it is in the understanding, nor if it is in the understanding that therefore it is in reality. I say with certainty that, if it can even be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exists.*

He then launches three arguments in defence of his Stage One conclusion. They are surprisingly different from what he presented in *Proslogion* II. Instead of establishing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is both in the understanding and in reality, all three establish the stronger conclusion, that it is unable not to exist, if it can be thought.

The first of those three arguments has two premises, both of which have to do with existing with a beginning. In typical fashion, he has presented his conclusion before stating the two reasons which serve as premises to entail that conclusion. The argument is quite short:

> *For* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning. But whatever can be thought to exist, but does not exist, can be thought to exist with a beginning. Therefore, it is not* [the case that something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist and* [*yet*] *not exist. If therefore it can be thought to exist, of necessity it exists.*

Anselm simply asserts these two premises without trying to justify them. He probably thought that their truth is obvious. Since I have said that it will be shown that the same four premises which entail the conclusion of the reformulated Stage One in Chapter 4 also entail the conclusion of this argument, the other three also need to be recalled:

(2) Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.
(3) Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x,* and some positive and primitive predicate *F,* which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y.*
(4) *Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.

1.1 *Justifying the First Premise*

All that is required to justify the first premise of this first argument – "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning" – is a proposition which was deduced from those four premises in §4.7. To recall, it was deduced on line (14) in Chapter 4 from the premises (1), (2), (3), and (4) that:

(5) Whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

The justification of the first premise of Anselm's argument begins with instantiating (2). Doing so yields:

(6) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

It follows from (6) by Conjunction Elimination that:

(7) If that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists with a beginning, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

Instantiating (5) yields:

(8) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist, it is greater at those times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.

Applying Anselm Distributing Conceivability rule to (8) yields:

(9) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist, then it can be thought that it is greater at those times when it exists than at those times when it does not exist.

Let us suppose that:

(10) It can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists at some times.

Now, it is a logical truth that:

(11) If it can be thought that there are times when that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not as great at some times as it is at some other times, then it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (9) and (11), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(12) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists at some times, but not at some other times, then it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (10) and (12), by *modus ponens*, that:

(13) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist at some other times, then it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

But is also a logical truth that:

(14) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (13) and (14), by *modus tollen*s, that:

(15) It is not possible that it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist at some times.

Now (15) has been deduced from supposing on line (10) that it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists at some times. So, it follows, by Conditional Proof, from (10) and (15) that:

(16) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it could not be thought that it exists at some times, but not at some other times.

Now, Anselm's Conceivability rule says that:

It is valid to infer from "It is possible that *p*" that "It is possible to think that *p*", that is, "It can be thought that *p*".

The contrapositive of that rule is equivalent to the rule itself. So, it is also valid to infer from "It is could not be thought that *p*" that "It is not possible that *p*". Applying the contrapositive of Anselm's Conceivability rule to (16), yields:

(17) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it is not possible that it exists at some times, but not at some other times.

It now follows from (7) and (17), by *modus tollens*, that:

(18) If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it is not possible that it has a beginning.

Generalizing the subject of (18) yields:

(19) If it can be thought that *something*-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it is not possible that it has a beginning.

The deduction of (19) has justified Anselm's first premise, for he expresses (19) as:

(20) [Something]-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning.

Since (20) has been deduced from (5), the first premise of Anselm's argument based on existing with a beginning is justified by the same premises which entail (5), namely (1), (2), (3), and (4).

1.2 *Justifying the Second Premise*

Anselm's second premise can be justified even more easily. Firstly. let us set aside the universe as a whole and consider some arbitrarily selected thing which did not exist at some time but either does, or at any rate might, exist at some later time. There is no shortage of examples of such things. So, let us agree to call this arbitrarily selected thing "*b*" and assume that:

(21) *b* does not exist at some time.

It follows from instantiating (2) that:

(22) If *b* were to exist at some later time, *b* would exist with a beginning.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability to (22), it follows that:

(23) If it can be thought that *b* exists at some time, then it can be thought that *b* would exist with a beginning.

Since it has been assumed on line (21) that *b* does not exist at some time, it follows (21) and (23), by Conditional Proof, that:

(24) If *b* does not exist at some time, but if it can be thought that it exists at some time, then it can be thought that *b* exists with a beginning.

Because what is thought to be so *at some time* can simply be thought to be so, (24) is true irrespective of whichever are the specific times when *b* exists or does not exist. So, it follows from (24) that:

(25) If *b* does not exist, but if it can be thought that it exists, then it can be thought that *b* exists with a beginning.

Since *b* is an arbitrarily selected thing which could be anything which does not exist at some time, and since the consequence (25) does not depend on any premise which mentions *b*, (25) may be universalized. Doing do yields:

(26) Whatever can be thought to exist, but does not exist, can be thought to exist with a beginning.

That conclusion (26) is Anselm's second premise. That it has been possible to justify these two premises so easily shows that the cosmological argument in §4.6 to §4.8 is faithful to Anselm's reasoning.

1.3 *Deducing Anselm's Conclusion*

Since both Anselm's premises have now been justified *a posteriori*, let us see how they entail the conclusion he asserts. Anselm's first premise says:

(20) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning.

To deduce a conclusion from that premise, he must assume:

(27) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning.

Instantiating Anselm's second premise, (26), it follows that

(28) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, but does *not* exist, it can be thought to exist with a beginning.

But (27) contradicts the consequent of (28). So, it follows from (27) and (28), by *modus tollens*, that:

(29) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, it is not possible that it does not exist.

(29) is equivalent to:

(30) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exists.

Generalizing the subject of (30) yields:

(31) If *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exists.

That conclusion has been deduced from the assumption (27) and Anselm's second premise (26). Since (31) does not mention that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, nor is it mentioned in Anselm's second premise, he may

reaffirm it as entailed no longer by the assumption (27), but by his first premise (20). Thus, it has been demonstrated that his two premises entail:

> (32) If *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exists.

In *Reply* 1 Anselm himself inferred:

> *Therefore, it is not* [the case that] *something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, and* [yet] *not exist. Therefore, if it can be thought to exist, it exists out of necessity* [ex necessitate est].

The deduction of (32) has demonstrated the validity of his inference. So not only are Anselm's two premises justified by the premises (1), (2), (3) and (4), but the conclusion of this argument based on beginning to exist is also validly entailed by them.

2 Some Reflections on This Argument

David Smith commented on this argument that:

> It is certainly, in my view, the most compelling argument that Anselm ever offered for the existence of *G* [= something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought]. Since the argument is wholly *a priori* in nature, it could perhaps be viewed as a form of the Ontological Argument.[1]

I agree that this argument is the most compelling argument that Anselm ever offered for the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, although I shall argue below that Anselm's objective in presenting it was not merely to show that there is an alternative way of establishing that conclusion. That he presents this argument, after some preliminary comments, as his first riposte to Gaunilo's objections shows that for him it has a very significant dialectal role.

But first, I have to disagree with Smith's assessment of this argument as "wholly *a priori* in nature" and "that it could perhaps be viewed as a form of the Ontological Argument". That assessment is understandable. Anselm presents his two premises as if their truth would be obvious to anyone who considered

1 Smith, *Anselm's Other* Argument, p. 125.

them for a few moments. Smith agrees that the first premise is "relatively straightforward". He points out that:

> Having a beginning indicates an ontological limitation of a sort which is incompatible with being *G* [= something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought]. As Anselm himself would look at the matter, it is incompatible with the "supreme truth" with which *G* must be conceived to exist.[2]

The truth of this observation has been demonstrated above. Since Smith is assuming that Anselm's first premise is justified by that "supreme truth" which prescribes how something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought must be conceived, it is understandable that he views this premise as established *a priori*. But this premise does not have to be justified in that way. As was shown in §5.1.1, Anselm's first premise can be deduced from (5), which has been validly deduced in §4.7 from the premise (1), the truth of which is known *a posteriori*.

As for the second premise, it is understandable that Smith interprets it as "*a priori* in nature", since its subject is "Whatever can be thought to exist", and if (2), the quasi-definition of having a beginning, did not have to be qualified by setting aside the universe as a whole, it would indeed by "*a priori* in nature", since it would be a straightforward definition. But we saw in §4.6 that that proposition cannot be a conceptual truth because if the universe had a beginning, there was *no* time when it did not exist. So, the quasi-definition (2) has to be qualified. That qualification is required on grounds known *a posteriori*, having been inferred from astronomical observations.

So, Anselm's second premise is not "wholly *a priori* in nature", as Smith claimed. Yet another attempt to foist 'the ontological argument' onto Anselm has failed. Anselm has presented an argument which he intuitively loaded with far more significance than he could possibly have known, living when he did.

Smith did not try to justify Anselm's second premise by deducing it from any mutual entailment concerning what it means to exist with a beginning. Instead, he says that:

> It is the second premise which is the controversial one.... Few people, I think, will see any reason at all to accept it. Many, indeed, will feel an intuitive resistance to the very strong claim that if something – *anything* – does not exist, it can be conceived to have a beginning if it can be conceived at all.[3]

2 Smith, *Anselm's Other* Argument, p. 125.

3 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 126.

Given how easily Anselm's second premise was justified in §5.1.2, I think that many people will have no difficulty in accepting it.

It was my reading Smith's *Anselm's Other Argument* soon after it appeared in 2014 which so revitalized my interest in Anselm's proof of the existence of God that I went back to the text to re-examine his arguments. For I found Smith's book to be the most thoughtful and thorough examination of Anselm's reasoning which had appeared to date. That is despite my coming subsequently to disagree with his interpretation on a number of points. I confess to being baffled by his assessment of Anselm's second premise.

Following the previous comment, Smith acknowledges that "This premise would certainly be true if the only way that something that does not actually exist could have existed is by its *coming into* existence". He asks however, "But why should we believe that?" He answers that rhetorical question by writing, "After all, most people who deny God's existence do not suppose that it makes much sense to suppose that God could possibly come into existence". That seems to be a very effective counter-example, for those people who believe that God does not exist might well acknowledge that God can be thought to exist, since that there are millions of other people who believe that He does. But, as Smith says, it makes little sense to say that God can be thought to *come into* existence. So, it seems that Anselm's second premise is false. Smith concludes that:

> The crucial premise cries out for justification. But Anselm does not attempt to justify it in this stretch of text. Nor does he explicitly argue for it anywhere else. How might he have justified it?

I agree with Smith that it makes little sense to say that God can be thought to *come into* existence, but nevertheless I am sure that Anselm would dismiss his counter-example outright. For, on Anselm's principles, the fact that many people *think* that God exists is not enough to establish that *it can be thought*, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that He does. Like the Fool, those disbelievers whom Smith cites could say that all those believers are simply thinking *the words* with no understanding of how it is even possible that God exists. According to Anselm, something can be thought only if it *can* be understood. But the disbelievers themselves do not understand how it can be thought that God does not exist, for, as Anselm himself said, "No-one who understand that which [*id quod*] God is can think that God does not exist". So, if these disbelievers *understood* that it 'can be thought', in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that God exists, they would not be disbelievers. Smith's counter-example fails to falsify Anselm's second premise.

I, for one, see no difficulty in accepting Anselm's second premise (26). For the justification of this premise in §5.1.2 required only (2), the quasi-definition of "having a beginning", and what I have called "Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule". Whatever does not exist, but is not impossible, would have to *come into* existence at some time if it were to exist at all. Since Anselm's Conceivability rule says that what is possible can be thought, his premise follows. Since this second premise can be justified so simply, directly, and effectively, there is no need to go searching, as Smith did, to find some considerations somewhere in Anselm's writings which might justify it.

I can think of only one reason which might explain why Smith did not see how simply this second premise could be justified. It seems that Smith did not recognize that Anselm is operating with that Conceivability rule of inference. I cannot think of any other explanation as to why Smith finds this premise so problematic, since his counter-example of what disbelievers in God might say is refuted by Anselm's own principles.

Smith did not try to justify those two premises by deducing them from any mutual entailment concerning what it means to exist with a beginning. Instead, he says that this second premise is straightforwardly derivable from two other propositions which he finds in the *Reply*. For Anselm says in *Reply* V that "What does not exist can be thought not to exist". Smith finds that acceptable; indeed, in §3.8 it was that logical truth which I generalized as Anselm's Conceivability Principle. The other relevant claim is that Anselm says in *Reply* III that if Gaunilo's Lost Island "could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end". However, Smith dismisses that claim, asserting that it is "obviously questionable" and that

> This is as much in need of justification as the crucial premise itself, and for more or less the same reason. We shall, however, seek in vain in Anselm's writings for any explicit justification of it.[4]

When Anselm claims in *Reply* III that "If it [Gaunilo's Lost Island] could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end", he is responding to Gaunilo's parody, and considering one of the two different ways of interpreting what this island is supposed to be. Although Anselm did not explicitly justify the claim in *Reply* III which Smith dismisses as "obviously questionable", it is not difficult to justify; it will be justified in §7.9. However, Smith devotes many pages to searching through Anselm's writings looking for ways in which that claim might be justified. He finds three such arguments, but then finds counter-examples to a step involved in two of those supporting

4 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 127.

arguments, which leads him to conclude that Anselm's second premise is unacceptable.

However, there was no need for Smith to do all that searching. The premise he assesses as unacceptable has been shown to be entailed by the quasi-definition (2) and Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule. There could hardly be a simpler justification than that.

Apart from David Smith, one of the few scholars to take notice of this argument is John Marenbon. Because, as was shown in §1.5, Marenbon misinterprets Anselm as introducing that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in *Proslogion* II as an exemplar of what is in the Fool's understanding, he has a negative assessment of Anselm's Stage One argument. But when he turns to what he calls "Anselm's Second Thoughts", he discusses this argument based on existing with a beginning and comments:

> Whatever its strengths and weaknesses, this piece of reasoning illustrates very well how, by the time he writes his *Reply*, Anselm has entirely abandoned his attempt to put his Argument using the semantics of existence in the intellect and in reality.[5]

Citing Simo Knuuttila's review of medieval discussions of modality, Marenbon suggests that Anselm's second premise – (26) above – can arguably be justified, because of the view of modality he ascribes to Anselm. According to this view, which can be found in some passages in Aristotle, there are no synchronic alternative possibilities, and what is, is necessarily, when it is.[6] So, the only way in which something could be thought to exist, when it does not, would be by beginning to exist at some time.

But there is nothing in the justification of Anselm's two premises, or in the deduction of his conclusion to suggest that Anselm is relying on such a view of modality. And there is clear evidence in the *Proslogion* that, on the contrary, Anselm accepts the possibility of synchronic alternative possibilities. He supposes in *Proslogion* II that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding, but can be thought to be in reality. Marenbon has endorsed Anselm's argument for an unsound reason. Despite this, he assesses this argument to be plausible; indeed, he warmly commends it, calling it "an elegant and powerful argument".[7] I agree with that assessment.

Anselm qualifies this conclusion (32) by expressing it as conditional upon "If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to

5 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 191.

6 Marenbon cites Simo Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London, 1993), pp. 1–18 and *passim*, in support of this reading.

7 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 190.

exist" because he is presenting it to Gaunilo as an alternative way of justifying his Stage One conclusion. Gaunilo objects that it is invalid to infer from having established that this something is in the understanding, that it must also be in reality, as Anselm had in *Proslogion* II. Modern critics of Anselm's proof keep repeating the same objection.

What those critics fail to recognize is that Anselm is aware of that objection. In the very first argument he presents in the *Reply* he is confronts and refutes that objection. For this argument demonstrates that it can validly be deduced that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists of necessity from thinking that it exists. Thereby, he has very cleverly and effectively demonstrated how his inference from thought to reality in *Proslogion* II is justified in the special case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Notably, it succeeds in doing so without invoking the predicate "is in the understanding".

Embedding Anselm's first argument in the *Reply* within the cosmological reformulation of his Stage One argument has strengthened that argument. He simply asserts his two premises, but it has been demonstrated that both those premises are deducible from the two cosmological premises (1) and (2) and the premises (3) and (4) extracted in §3.3 from his explanation in *Reply* VIII of how it is possible to infer his so-called formula.

Thereby, Anselm has exposed the objection that nothing about reality could ever be validly inferred from thought as nothing more than prejudice. For he has mounted a very strong case which has been rendered even stronger by being embedded in the cosmological reformulation of Stage One presented in Chapter 4. My presentation of the two arguments in that chapter was motivated by my taking seriously the demand for factual evidence if was to be validly concluded that something is in reality, as I explained in Chapter 2.

It has emerged that not only is the conclusion of his Stage One argument entailed by two premises which are supported by a whole universe full of factual evidence, but also that those same premises entail that if it can be thought that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it exists necessarily. Anselm argues in *Reply* III that this controversial inference is valid only in the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. His demonstration of the uniqueness of this case, which has been ignored by everyone who has ever commented on Gaunilo's parody of the Lost Island, will be examined in Chapter 7.

3 The Constructive Dilemma Based on Existing Contingently

Lest Gaunilo, or anyone else, find some reason to object to this argument based on existing with a beginning, Anselm presents an even stronger form

of argument designed to establish the very same conclusion. For he invokes the strongest form of argument there is in order to show that it is indisputable that the possibility of *thinking* of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought entails that it is unable not to exist.

Having inferred the conclusion (32), Anselm immediately asserts in *Reply* 1:

> *Furthermore, if it can be thought at all, it is necessary that it exists.*

He justifies that claim by presenting two arguments. The first is based on his supposing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, and the second begins by assuming that it does not exist. David Smith calls this second argument a "continuation" of the first argument, and comments:

> This continuation is somewhat puzzling, to me at least. Anselm has, to his own satisfaction at least, just provided a sound argument for the existence of *G* [=]. So why does he then suppose that this conclusion is false, and launch upon another stretch of argument?[8]

What Smith has not noticed is that, by constructing two arguments which proceed from contradictory assumptions, Anselm is presenting the complex form of argument called a "Constructive Dilemma". Such an argument has a disjunction as an over-arching premise. A conclusion is then deduced from each of the two alternatives in that disjunction. Those two conclusions may validly be put together in form a single disjunction which is implied by the over-arching premise. That is what Anselm is doing here, without explicitly asserting the relevant overarching premise:

(33) *Either* something than which a greater cannot be thought exists, *or* it does not.

That is an instance of the logical Law of Excluded Middle. Since *both* alternatives entail the conclusion, "Something than which a greater cannot be thought is unable not to exist, if it can be thought", Anselm will have proven that conclusion on the strongest possible grounds.

As is his custom, Anselm begins the first leg of this dilemma by stating its conclusion and then the reasons which entail that conclusion:

8 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 119.

> *For no one denying or doubting that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists, denies or doubts that, if it were to exist, it would not be able not to exist, either in actuality or in the understanding. For otherwise it would not be* [*something*] *than which a greater cannot be thought. But whatever can be thought and does not exist, if it were to exist, would be able not to exist either in actuality or in the understanding. Therefore, if it can even be thought, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.*

Anselm's first premise that "no one denying or doubting that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, denies or doubts that, if it were to exist, it would not be able not to exist, either in actuality or in the understanding" is easily justified. For he has just shown in the argument based on existing with a beginning, that if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be *thought* to exist, it is unable not to exist. Since his Conceivability Principle says that if it exists, it can be *thought* to exist, his first premise is justified. Anselm attaches the comment, "either in actuality or in the understanding" to both premises, but that comment plays no role in the deduction of his conclusion.

The second premise in this argument is:

> *Whatever can be thought and does not exist, if it were to exist, would be able not to exist, either in actuality or in the understanding.*

It has also been shown in Chapter 4 that there are myriads of things which both exist at some time, but do not exist at some other time. It follows by the widely accepted rule of Inferring Possibility, that all such things are both able to exist and able not to exist. Therefore, according to Anselm's Conceivability rule, they all can both be thought to exist and be thought not to exist. So whatever can be thought not to exist is able to exist, and if it were to exist, it would still be able not to exist.

That justifies Anselm's second premise. There is nothing peculiar about this premise, which is true of every observable thing which exists at some time in the universe. Yet it has also been established in Chapter 4, on line (36), that it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* one of the observable things in the universe, because it is *always* in reality. So the conclusion which Anselm asserts is validly deduced.

The second argument is based on his assuming the opposite to what he supposed in the first leg of this dilemma, for he writes:

> *But let us assume that it does not exist, even if it can be thought. Whatever can be thought and does not exist, if it were to exist, would not be* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought. If therefore* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were to exist, it would not be* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought. This is absurd. Therefore, it is false that something than which a greater cannot be thought does not exist, if it can even be thought. And all the more so, if it can be understood and is in the understanding*.

It seems that Anselm is content to have shown that this second assumption is false, but since that assumption entails its own negation, he has in fact shown, for a third time, that:

> *It is necessary that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists, if it can be thought*.

He again asserts just one crucial premise:

> *Whatever can be thought and does not exist, if it were to exist, would not be* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought*.

This echoes the crucial premise in the first leg of this dilemma, except that Anselm has changed the consequent from "is able to not to exist" to "would not be [something] than which a greater cannot be thought". That substitution is justified by the conclusion of the first leg of this dilemma. That premise is all Anselm needs to infer from the assumption that:

> *It is false that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, if it can even be thought*.

Since Anselm has demonstrated that that assumption entails its own falsity, not only is not merely false; it is *impossible*. So, Anselm has demonstrated that assuming the opposite of the first assumption entails the very same conclusion:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it if can be thought*.

There could not be a stronger demonstration of the validity of Anselm's inferring in Stage One that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is

in reality from its being in the understanding. I said above that by presenting his argument based on existing with a beginning Anselm has exposed the objection that nothing about reality could ever be validly inferred from thought as nothing more than prejudice. Because this Constructive Dilemma derives that same conclusion from an instance of a logical law, he has demonstrated that it is *impossible* to maintain that prejudice.

It is notable that the crucial premise in both legs of this dilemma rely upon the conceptual truth that: "Whatever can be thought and does not exist, if it were to exist, would be able not to exist". That is Anselm's way of saying that all conceivable things which are able not to exist, exist contingently, *even if they do exist*. The point of his arguments is that no such thing could be something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. So in a way different from that presented in §4.9, he has established that his Stage One conclusion is true because it follows from an instance of a logical law that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, if it can be thought.

4 Some Reflections on Existing with a Beginning

I said in §4.5 that the train of reasoning which leads Anselm to his proof of the existence of God does not begin with what he said in *Proslogion* II, but with his inferring the concept of something than which nothing greater could be thought. He himself has accomplished the mental ascent from those things which exist with a beginning and an end. That is why it was possible in Chapter 4 to deduce stronger versions of his Stage One conclusion from the premise (1): "Every observable thing which exists at some time in the universe has a beginning".

In this reconstruction of his first *Reply* I argument we have seen that not only does he validly deduce the conclusion (32) from premises which are justified by the premises (1), (2), (3), and (4). But those four premises suffice to extend the conclusion (32) so that the conclusion he deduces in *Reply* I follows from it unconditionally. I therefore submit that the cosmological reformulations of his Stage One argument in Chapter 4 and above are not anachronistic revisions of his proof, but expose the deeper metaphysical insights upon which his proof is based. The same can be said of the constructive dilemma which he presents next.

That is why I have presented this justification of these *Reply* I arguments. In the *Reply* Anselm is not abandoning the arguments he presented in *Proslogion* II and III. In particular, in response to Gaunilo's misunderstanding and scepticism, he presents a series of arguments which underpin some of the

basic concepts which he deploys in Stage One. For his explanation in *Reply* VIII of how it can be thought that something is such that nothing greater can be thought takes off from thinking of something which would be better than the contingent and precarious existence of everything in the universe. Since it is better to exist than not to exist, something which does not have a beginning nor an end is better than anything in the universe.

We have now seen that it is those concepts which are at work in his restatements in *Reply* I of his original Stage One argument. My initial motivation in writing this book was to see if his Stage One conclusion could be proven without inferring it from what is in the understanding. But I have found much more than that. Prompted by Anselm's argument which has been examined in this chapter, I have not only attained my initial objective, but I have found that counterposing the concepts of existing with a beginning with being unable not to exist have revealed the metaphysical wellspring of his Stage One argument.

CHAPTER 6

A Cosmological Reformulation of Stage Two of Anselm's Proof

In Chapter 4, the conclusions of Anselm's original Stage One – that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, and that it is necessary that it is in reality – were proven without first establishing that it is in the understanding. Instead, they were deduced from the factual proposition supported by empirical evidence: that every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning. The task for this chapter is to show how his Stage Two conclusions can similarly be proven from that basic premise.

In the first half of *Proslogion* III, Anselm argues for the conclusion:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.*

Anselm deduces that conclusion by first deducing what I call his 'interim conclusion': that "*Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist*", and then interpolating the phase "*so truly exists that*" into the middle of his interim conclusion.

When I was introducing Anselm's original three-stage proof of the existence of God in Chapter 1, I mentioned in §1.6.2 that the sentence in which Anselm introduces the premise of Stage Two in *Proslogion* III has been consistently mistranslated. The various translations of that sentence will be discussed in §6.1 so that what Anselm asserted as the premise of his original Stage Two can be properly discerned.

I also reported in §1.6.2 that since writing *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I have made two more discoveries about Anselm's original Stage Two. I was right to demonstrate in that book that his Stage Two premise can be deduced from the stronger version of his Stage One conclusion. But instead of deducing it by adapting the argument Anselm presents in *Reply* IX, that premise can be deduced in a much simpler way directly from the conclusion of the cosmological reformulation of Stage One presented in §4.9. I shall demonstrate that in §6.2.

The second discovery I mentioned in §1.6.2 concerns how Anselm proves that since that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to be something which *could not* be thought not to exist, it is greater than if it *can* be thought not to exist. I have found that that can be justified in a much

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simpler way than I did previously. For that Stage Two comparison can be derived straightforwardly from the comparison proven in Appendix A, that: "If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality". That will enable a much shorter and more transparent reformulation of Anselm's Stage Two argument than the reconstruction of Anselm's original argument which I presented in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. Whereas it took 60 lines in that book to deduce Anselm's final conclusion from his premise, the deduction of it in §6.3 and §6.4 requires only 23 lines.

1 Discerning the Premise of Anselm's Original Stage Two

Just as in the middle of *Proslogion* II Anselm announced the conclusion which he was about to prove, so he begins *Proslogion* III by announcing the conclusion he is about to prove before he presents the argument which entails it. This is characteristic of his style. He writes:

> *Quod utique sic vere est ut nec cogitari possit non esse.*
>
> Which certainly so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

This is a relative clause which has to be understood as attached to the last sentence of *Proslogion* II, the conclusions of Stage One. In the oldest manuscripts of the *Proslogion* the chapter 'headings' appear only in a list following the Preface, like a modern table of contents. So, it would have been clear to any reader of the oldest manuscripts that the relative pronoun "*quod*" refers to the subject of the conclusion of Stage One. Consequently, that the argument Anselm is introducing is about the subject of his Stage One. But the practice of modern translators of inserting the 'heading' of each chapter at the beginning of the relevant chapter has obscured the fact that the word "*quod*" refers to the subject of the conclusion of *Proslogion* II. That is unfortunate, because it has led to much confusion.

In the 1960s there was considerable debate amongst commentators about the relation of the argument in *Proslogion* III to the argument in *Proslogion* II. That debate was provoked by two philosophers, Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne, who each declared that the argument in the first half of *Proslogion* III was independent of the argument in *Proslogion* II.[1] Moreover,

1 Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960), pp. 41–62 and Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* and *Anselm's Discovery*.

they both claimed that, unlike what Anselm had argued in *Proslogion* II, the argument in *Proslogion* III was valid, and that when his expression "can be thought" is transformed into the simple modal operator "It is possible that …", it proves the existence of a necessary being.

One reason why it seemed plausible to treat the argument in *Proslogion* III as independent of the one in *Proslogion* II was because of the insertion of the 'heading' of this chapter between the text of *Proslogion* II and III. But that was not the only reason why there was so much confusion and debate. All the English translations of the relevant passage in the *Proslogion* published since 1967, apart from my own in *From Belief to Understanding*, consistently mistranslate the sentence in which Anselm asserts his Stage Two premise, for none refer to the conclusion of Stage One.

Anselm asserts the premise of Stage Two in the main clause of a sentence he wrote immediately after the sentence beginning with "*quod*" quoted above. That clause is:[2]

(A) *Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid quod non possit cogitari non esse.*

Two older translations, by Eugene Fairweather and Max Charlesworth, understand "*esse*" as meaning "to exist", and "*aliquid*" [something] to be the subject of the main clause.[3] For example, in 1965 Charlesworth rendered that clause as:

(A:1) For something can be thought to exist which cannot be thought not to exist.

More recently, Gregory Schufreider also rendered it as:

(A:1*) For something can be thought to be that cannot be thought not to be.[4]

With these exceptions, all the other translations into English of the *Proslogion* which have been published since 1967 understand the verbal phrase "*potest cogitari*" as impersonal, meaning "it can be thought", and both occurrences of the verb "*esse*" as meaning "exists". Thus, all those translations, with minor variations, construe the clause (A) as meaning:

2 I label the main clause of Anselm's sentence (A) so that I can easily refer to it. The various English translations of that clause will be labelled (A:1), (A:2), etc.

3 Eugene R. Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, p. 74; Max Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 119.

4 *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 327.

(A:2) For there can be thought to exist something which cannot be thought not to exist.

There are many similar translations which, for all their variety, all mean the same.[5] When Anselm's Latin clause is considered with no regard to its context, both (A:1) and (A:2) are legitimate translations. They mean much the same. However, David Smith objects vigorously to all the above translations. He argues at length that translating this clause in either of these ways expresses a proposition which is much too strong to be acceptable as a premise. He argues:

> Anselm would not have presented without any justification whatsoever so bold a claim as that we can conceive of something that cannot be conceived not to exist – when, that is, the question of whether the thing in question actually exists has not been settled.[6]

Smith devotes many pages to arguing that if the argument in *Proslogion* III is to be acceptable, it must be dependent upon the argument in *Proslogion* II. He ends his discussion by strongly supporting a *third* way of translating this sentence, one which I proposed in 1976:

(A:3) For it [i.e., the subject of the conclusion of *Proslogion* II: something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] can be thought to be something which cannot be thought not to exist.

In *From Belief to Understanding* I submitted that the appropriate way of understanding the Latin clause (A) is to interpret its subject to be the same as the subject of the preceding sentence, the one in which he announces the conclusion he is about to deduce. Anselm often omits the subject of a verb, or the noun which a relative clause qualifies, especially in the *Reply*. I suggested that Anselm saw no need to articulate the subject of this second sentence because it would be repetitious to do so. For on my reading of this sentence, the subject

5 Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 34; Sidney Deane, *St Anselm – Basic Writings*, p.8; Jasper Hopkins & Herbert Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury*, Vol. One, p.94. That translation also appears in Jasper Hopkins, *A New Interpretative Translation*. Robert Adams' translation: 'The Logical Structure of Anselm's Arguments', *The Philosophical Review*, 80:1 (1971), p. 49; Benedicta Ward, *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*. Thomas Williams, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, p. 82; David Burr, *Anselm on God's Existence*, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/anselm.asp (accessed 21 March 2021); and Matthew Walz, *Proslogion*, p. 24.

6 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 106.

of its verb "*potest*" is the same as the subject of the preceding sentence, the relative pronoun *quod*, which in turn refers to the subject of the conclusion of *Proslogion* II. Accordingly, I proposed that the clause (A) *has a specific but implicit subject*. That has always seemed to me to be the appropriate construal because each of those two sentences speak of something which could not be thought not to exist.

David Smith strongly endorses my construal of the sentence (A).[7] It is equivalent to Arthur McGill's 1967 translation: "It can be conceived to be something such that we cannot conceive it as not existing".[8] His and my translations are the two exceptions to the mistranslation of (A) in all the English translations of the *Proslogion*.

However, when I was writing *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I realized that my proposal too was not quite correct. Both McGill and I had failed to notice – as do all the other published translations – that the second verb in that clause, "*possit*", is in the subjunctive mood. Correcting that mistake, I insisted that the main clause sentence (A) which contains Anselm's premise has to be translated as follows:

> (A:4) For it [i.e., the subject of the conclusion of *Proslogion* II: something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] can be thought to be something which *could* not be thought not to exist.[9]

When fully articulated, Anselm's Stage Two premise in *Proslogion* III is:

> *If there exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, both in the understanding and in reality, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist*.

It can be shown that that premise straightforwardly entails the conclusion of Stage Two which Anselm announced, but I am postponing demonstrating that until after I have shown that the premise (A:4) can also be validly deduced from one of the conclusions in Chapter 4, the cosmological reformulation of Stage One of Anselm's proof.

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7 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 106.

8 McGill, 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument', p. 6. McGill's translation is a little clumsy, but correctly identifies the subject of (A). For reasons I shall shortly explain, it is deplorable that none of the translators since have followed his lead.

9 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 16, pp. 160–67.

One reason to construe (A) as (A:4) is that Anselm introduces (A) with the conjunction "*nam*" ["for"]. That word makes it clear that the second sentence provides the reason why the conclusion he has anticipated is true. Indeed, the word "*nam*" leads us readers to expect that the subject of the second sentence is the same as the subject of the first. But there are four much stronger reasons for translating Anselm's Latin sentence (A) as (A:4).

Firstly, as Smuth has said so forcefully, when the sentence (A) is translated as either (A:1) or as one of the varieties of (A:2), it much too strong to be acceptable as a premise unless the question of whether the thing in question actually exists has already been settled. Anselm himself insists on that. For he writes in *Reply* I that:

> *But* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, if it exists. For otherwise, if it exists, it is not* [something] *than which a greater could not be thought, which is not consistent* [convenit].

It will be demonstrated that that inference is valid. Anselm repeats that implication by asserting its contrapositive in *Reply* III, where, in response to Gaunilo's presenting his Lost Island as a counter-example to Anselm's Stage One argument, he points out that:

> *Moreover, it has already been seen plainly that* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought, which exists by such certain reasoning of truth, cannot be thought not to exist. Otherwise it would in no way exist.*

Anselm does not merely assert these two sentences in *Reply* III; he justifies them by presenting an alternative Stage Two argument which will be examined in Chapter 7.

Secondly, when the clause (A) is translated either as (A:1) or as one of the varieties of (A:2), it is not possible to deduce his interim conclusion without introducing a second premise which is not in the text. For there is nothing in either (A:1) or (A:2) from which it could be deduced that if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *cannot* be thought not to exist it would be greater than if it *can* be thought not to exist. So, a second premise has to be imported to justify that inference, namely:

> What cannot be thought not to exist is greater than what can be thought not to exist.

However, this alleged 'background premise' is not in the text, is unjustified, and is too *ad hoc* to be acceptable as a premise.

One of the few commentators to reject such a second premise is Richard La Croix who correctly claims that both that Anselm explicitly says no such thing in this argument (which is true) and also that Anselm is not even implicitly relying on it when he asserts the second clause.[10] In an extensive discussion of this issue David Smith finds reasons to reject La Croix's analysis, and eventually suggests that "we regard the second clause as inferred from the first, together with a background assumption (or implicit premise) to the effect that whatever cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than anything which can be conceived not to exist",[11] despite his acknowledging that there is no justification in text for doings so.

The commentators who introduce it try to justify their doing so by appealing to the comment which Anselm attaches to (A):

> *… which is greater than what can be thought not to exist.*

But that comment is not hinting at a second premise. Indeed, no such second premise is required. When Anselm's Latin sentence (A) is translated as (A:4), that comment is justified in the course of deducing his conclusion. The only role of the comment which Anselm attaches to his premise is to introduce the concept of 'what can be thought not to exist'. Nothing more.

Thirdly, there is nothing in the argument when (A:1) or (A:2) is understood to be its premise which could justify Anselm's conclusion *exactly as he states it*. In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I overstated that objection, alleging that when this premise is translated either as (A:1) or (A:2):

> There is nothing in this argument to establish either that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, or that there does exist something which cannot be thought not to exist.[12]

That overstates this third objection. It is possible, although unnecessary and unwarranted, to import that alleged 'background premise' into the argument. From those two unacceptable premises it is then possible to deduce the interim conclusion of Stage Two:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.*

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10 *Proslogion II and III: A Third Interpretation of Anselm's Argument*, 1972, p. 85.

11 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 88.

12 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 215.

It is then possible to invoke the contrapositive of Anselm's Conceivability rule to infer from the interim conclusion that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, and consequently, that it exists. But there is not even a hint in the text that that is how Anselm is reasoning, Quite the contrary; I have pointed to the signs in the text that Anselm introduces the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought into Stage Two by referring to the conclusion of Stage One.

However, when Anselm's Stage Two argument is construed in this way, what it entails is that "Because something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist, it exists". But the conclusion which Anselm actually deduces cannot be inferred from that implication, because it is the *converse* of the implication from which he infers his conclusion: that "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist". Instead, as will be shown, he infers his conclusion from validly deducing "Because it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it could not be thought not to exist". Since *no* implication is equivalent to its converse, there is no way that the conclusion of Stage Two can be validly deduced from the premise (A) when it is construed as anything like (A:1) or (A:2).

On the other hand, when (A) is construed as asserting (A:4), the logic of his argument becomes transparent and its reasoning validated. There is no need of a second premise, and the conclusion which Anselm announced can be validly deduced exactly as he stated it. That will be shown in §6.3 and §6.4.

Thus the premise of Stage Two does not introduce a new consideration; it is an implication of the conclusion of Stage One. That is true of Anselm's original Stage Two argument, and it will now be shown that the four premises which in Chapter 4 entail the reformulated Stage One also entail his Stage Two premise, for the only difference between them in is the way in which his Stage Two premise is derived from Stage One.

2 Deriving the Premise of Stage Two from the Reformulated Stage One Conclusion

The conclusion of Anselm's original Stage One is "There exists, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, both in the understanding and in reality". He deduced that conclusion from having validly deduced in *Proslogion* II that:

> *If therefore that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding, that itself* [id ipsum] *than which a greater cannot be*

> *thought is* [something] *than which a greater can be thought. But surely this cannot be.*

However, Anselm could have deduced a stronger conclusion. For that impossibility also entails: "It is *necessary* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality". In the original version of his proof that stronger Stage One conclusion is what entails the premise of Stage Two when that premise is construed as (A:4).

However, in the cosmological reformulation of His Stage One argument in Chapter 4 an even stronger version of his Stage One conclusion was deduced in §4.9 from just four premises and six logical truths. The proof of the conclusion of Stage Two which I am about to present will be dependent upon that conclusion proven in §4.9. So, it is appropriate to begin by recalling the four premises which in Chapter 4 entailed that conclusion:

(1) The empirically confirmed fact: Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.
(2) The quasi-definition of having a beginning: Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.
(3) The definition of "greater than": Anything x is greater than anything y if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe y are mutually realizable and are true of x, and some positive and primitive predicate F, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of x but not of y.
(4) The premise implicit in Anselm's explanation of how any rational mind can conceive something than which nothing greater could be thought: *Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.

From those four premises it was deduced in §4.9 on line (53) that:

(5) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

In order to deduce anything from (5) it is necessary to assume that what (5) says about something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is true of an exemplar of it. Since (5) has been deduced in §4.9 from propositions the subject of which is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, it is legitimate to assume that the same instance of anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be selected as the exemplar of the subject of the assumption which echoes (5). So let us assume:

(6) It is necessary that *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

Since "*x* is unable not to exist" is logically equivalent to "*x* exists necessarily", and it is a logical truth that "*x* exists necessarily" implies that "*x* exists" (6) implies that:

(7) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

(7) is equivalent to:

(8) It is not possible that that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.

In §3.7, I discussed the distinction which Anselm draws in *Proslogion* IV: "For a thing is thought in one way when the word signifying it is thought, and in another way when the thing itself is understood". It was also pointed out in §3.7 that both the Latin verb "*intelligere*" and the English verb "understand" imply cognitive success. The discussion there led to the formulation on line (14) of the following principle which is evident in Anselm's reasoning:

(9) Whatever is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which something is thought when the thing itself is understood.

Substituting "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist" for "Whatever" in (9) yields:

(10) If it is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, then it cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.

It follows from (8) and (10), by *modus ponens*, that:

(11) It cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.

Since Anselm understands "It is not possible that it can be thought that …" to be equivalent to "… could not be thought that …", (11) is equivalent to:

(12) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which *could not* be thought not to exist.

Now, in §3.8 I discerned what I called Anselm's Conceivability Principle. It says that:

(13) If *p*, it can be thought that *p*.

Substituting (12) for "*p*" in (13) yields:

(14) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist, then it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist.

From (12) and (14), it follows, by *modus ponens*, that:

(15) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist.

Since (15) has been deduced from the assumption (6), it follows from (6) and (15), by Conditional Proof, that:

(16) If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

Generalizing the subject of (16) yields:

(17) If it is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

The consequence (17) has been deduced from (6), an assumption which introduced the singular term, "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought".

Since (17) has been deduced from (6), but does not mention *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, nor is it mentioned in any other premise on which (17) depends, that consequence may be reaffirmed as entailed by (5).

(18) If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

That discharges the assumption (6). The proposition (18) is the premise of this reformulation of Anselm's Stage Two argument. Its consequent is exactly the same as (A:4), which I have always contended is the proper translation of the sentence (A) which he asserted at the beginning of *Proslogion* III. But the antecedent of (18) is (5), not the conclusion of *Proslogion* II. (5) is the strongest of the Stage One conclusions deduced in the *Proslogion* and in the reformulated Stage One argument in Chapter 4.

The conclusion (18) is equivalent to the conclusion Anselm actually infers as the conclusion of *Proslogion* II in the sense that one is true if, and only if, the other is true. Although the conclusion "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality" is not in the text of *Proslogion* II, Anselm was evidently well aware that it entails his Stage Two premise in the same way as the deduction above does. For he deduces his final Stage Two conclusion from its interim conclusion by interpolating the words "so truly exists that" into his interim conclusion. That interpolation is justified by the fact that his Stage Two premise is entailed by (5).

3 Deducing the Interim Conclusion of Stage Two

I now have recognized that Anselm's conclusion can be validly deduced from his premise (A) when it is construed as (A:4) in a much shorter and simpler way than I did in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. For all that is required to deduce both the interim and the actual conclusion is what has been proven in §6.2 and a proposition which constitutes one of the steps in the deduction of the conclusion of Stage One.

In order to deduce anything from the premise (18) it is necessary to assume that what (18) says about something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is true of an exemplar of it. Since (18) has been deduced in §6.2 from (5), and (5) was deduced in §4.9 from propositions the subject of which is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, it is legitimate to assume that the same

instance of anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be selected as the exemplar of the subject of (18). So let us assume:

(19) If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

I have also found that, in order to facilitate the deduction, it is helpful also to assume that:

(20) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

Before the argument is complete, the two assumptions (19) and (20) will have to be discharged if Anselm's conclusion is to be deduced validly from his premise (18). It follows from (19) and (20), by *modus ponens*, that:

(21) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

Anselm's Conceivability Principle has already been invoked on line (13) above. It says: "If *p*, it can be thought that *p*." Substituting "That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist" for "*p*" in (13) yields:

(22) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, it can be thought that it does not to exist.

The contrapositive of (22) is equivalent to (22). It says:

(23) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it exists.

Now, in *Proslogion* II Anselm asserted:

> For if it [i.e., that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *is solely in the understanding, it can also be thought to be in reality, which is greater*.

While there has been much debate about how Anselm justifies that comment, "which is greater", it is shown in Appendix A that that comment is justified.

For it is demonstrated on line (24) of Appendix A that the premises (3) and (4) entail that:

(24) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality.

Anselm formulates his arguments in *Proslogion* III in terms of "exists", rather than "is in reality". To accommodate his inferring one of those different predicates from the other, in §4.8 I introduced the following conceptual truth:

(25) Anything is in reality if, and only if, it exists.

It follows from (24) and (25), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(26) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were to exist, it would be greater than it would be if it were not to exist.

That conditional proposition (26), together with the premise (18), is all that is required to deduce his interim Stage Two conclusion.

It follows from (23) and (26), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(27) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it is greater than it would be if it were not to exist.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (27), it follows that:

(28) If it can be thought that that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it can be thought that it is greater than it would be if it can be thought not to exist.

The antecedent of (28) is the same as the consequent of (19) which was introduced as an assumption so that conclusions could be deduced from Anselm's Stage Two premise (18). I take that as confirming the interpretation of his premise which I have always advocated.

So when Anselm attaches the comment "which is greater than what can be thought not to exist" to (A), he is *not* hinting at some missing premise lurking in the background. I have ascertained that that comment is also provable from (24), but I am not presenting that deduction here because it is quite unnecessary. The only role which that comment plays in this Stage Two argument is to

introduce the concept of 'what *can* be thought not to exist'. That shows how misguided are those commentators who introduce a second premise which they try to justify on the basis of the comment Anselm attaches to (A). When Anselm wrote that comment he was simply anticipating that (28) would be deducible from (19) and (24).

Now, it has already been deduced from the two assumptions (19) and (20) that (21): "That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist". Since (21) is the same as the antecedent of (28), it follows from (21) and (28), by *modus ponens*, that:

(29) It can be thought that that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought is greater than it would be if it can be thought not to exist.

It is a logical truth, implied by the simple rule of Double Negation, that:

(30) If it can be thought that something is greater than that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought, then that thing itself [*id ipsum*] than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It therefore follows from (29) and (30), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(31) If it *can* be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, then that thing itself [*id ipsum*] than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.

That is exactly what Anselm wrote in *Proslogion* III. And as he said, that "cannot be consistent". For it is a logical truth that:

(32) It is not possible that that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (31) and (32), by *modus tollens*, that:

(33) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

Because Anselm understands "It is not possible that … can …" as equivalent to "… could not …", he expresses (33) as:

(34) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist.

Now (34) has been deduced from the two assumptions (19) and (20), and since they have not been discharged, (34) is still dependent upon those assumptions. However, it follows from (20) and (34), by Conditional Proof, that:

(35) If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.

That discharges the assumption (20). Generalizing the subject of (35) yields:

(36) If it is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.

(36) is still dependent, however, on the assumption (19) and the premises (3) and (4) which entailed (24). To recall, the assumption (19) says:

(19) If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

Although the consequence (36) is still dependent upon (19), it does not mention that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, nor is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought mentioned in the other two premises which entailed (36), namely, (3) and (4). Since (19) was assumed to be the same as (18) but with a singular subject which is an exemplar of the subject of (18), (36) may be reaffirmed as a conclusion entailed by the premise of Stage Two, (18). That is, the premise (18) entails that:

(37) If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.

The antecedent of (37) is (5), the conclusion proven in the reformulation of Stage One which has been proven in §4.9. It therefore follows from (5) and (37), by *modus ponens*, that:

(38) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist.

(38) is what I have been calling "the interim conclusion" of Stage Two. It has been proven from the same premises (1), (2), (3), and (4) as entailed the conclusions of our reformulated Stage One in Chapter 4.

4 Deducing Anselm's Actual Stage Two Conclusion

But (38) is not the conclusion of Stage Two. What Anselm concludes is:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought* so truly exists that *it could not be thought not to exist.*

It has just been shown that the interim conclusion of Stage Two, (38), has been deduced from (5) and (37). A conditional proposition like (37) would quite rightly be understood as stating that the truth of the consequent is dependent on the truth of its antecedent. But in the case of (37), the antecedent is itself a proven truth. So, following the precedent of David Smith who makes a similar manoeuvre when deriving Anselm's Stage Two conclusion, (37) may be restated equivalently as:

(39) *Because* it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.

Conjoining (5) and (39) yields:

(40) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, and *because* it is necessarily true that it is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.

Anselm expresses this conclusion equivalently as:

(41) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

It has now been demonstrated that both the premise of Stage Two of Anselm's proof and its conclusion are entailed by the reformulated Stage One conclusion, "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist". That proposition is extraordinarily strong, for it asserts that it is necessary that something has a nature which is so strong that it is not possible even to think that it is able not to exist. I commented in §4.9 that

the stronger Stage One proof which entails that conclusion demonstrates *the ontological ground* which underlies both Anselm's proof in *Proslogion* II and Anselm's argument in *Reply* I based on existing with a beginning.

The original argument by which Anselm deduces his Stage Two conclusion can be reconstructed in the same way as this reformulation of Stage Two. It differs in only one respect. It appears that in the *Proslogion* Anselm deduced the premise of Stage Two from the proposition "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality" which he could have deduced from the argument he presented in *Proslogion* II. I say that because, although that proposition does not appear in the text, he has no other justification for that premise, nor for interpolating the phrase "so truly exists that" into the interim conclusion of Stage Two. In this chapter, both the premise of Stage Two and consequently interpolating that phrase into his interim conclusion are justified by the Stage One conclusion "It is necessary that that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist", which was proven on line (53) in Chapter 4.

That necessary truth which justifies interpolating that same phrase in this cosmological reformulation of that proof is extraordinarily strong, for it asserts that it is a necessary truth that something has a nature which ensures that it exists necessarily. It is much stronger than Anselm's necessary truth, for it is doubly necessary. Thus what is concluded on line (41) above is that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists with even greater intensity than Anselm himself was able to conclude. That is the only respect in which this reformulated version of Stage Two differs from Anselm's original Stage Two in *Proslogion* III.

What has now been shown is that, contrary to how *Proslogion* III is generally misunderstood, the conclusion of Stage Two is a corollary of the argument in Stage One. That conclusion is entailed by the same set of premises, whether those in Anselm's original Stage One, or those in the reformulated Stage One in Chapter 4. Anselm's descriptive phrase "something than which a greater cannot be thought" is so powerful that not only does it entail its own existence, but it also entails (41).

While that phrase explicitly contains the concept of "greater than", as we saw when discussing *Reply* VIII, it implicitly assumes that it is better to exist than not to exist. That is rendered explicit by the premise (4). So anyone with a rational mind who lifts their thinking above everything which exists in the universe, in order to think of something better, has to be thinking of something which exists and will not be able to think of anything better than something which could not be thought not to exist. The latter implication is what Stage Two makes explicit.

CHAPTER 7

Sinking the Lost Island: Anselm's Alternative Stage Two Argument

In Chapter 5 the arguments which Anselm presented in *Reply* I in response to Gaunilo's objections to Stage One were examined. But Gaunilo's main claim to fame is a parody he constructed to disprove Anselm's Stage One argument. For Gaunilo argues that an island which is known *not* to exist can be proven to exist somewhere in reality by the same argumentation which Anselm deploys in *Proslogion* II. Since Anselm's Stage One argument permits a false conclusion to be deduced from premises supposed to be true, it must be invalid.

Whether Gaunilo's parody is successful has become a topic of extensive debate amongst contemporary analytic philosophers. In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I presented a counter-argument based on the three-stage structure of Anselm's proof, which showed that Anselm is already three steps ahead of his critics. I have no doubt that that refutation of Gaunilo's Lost island is effective. But what I overlooked was that in *Reply* III Anselm himself presents three distinct responses to Gaunilo' parody. This chapter will make amends for that omission.

But that is not the only reason why this chapter will revisit Gaunilo's Lost Island. The extensive commentary on this issue focusses almost entirely on Anselm's first response. I am aware of only one inadequate discussion of his second response, and am not aware of any discussion of his third response. Yet as part of Anselm's third response he presents an alternative Stage Two argument very different from the one in the first half of *Proslogion* III. For it begins with his asserting:

> *If it* [i.e., something than which a greater cannot be thought] *could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end, but this is not possible*.

There are no references to having a beginning or an end in Anselm's original Stage Two argument in *Proslogion* III. Rather, this argument is reminiscent of the first argument in *Reply* I, which was examined in Chapter 5 and found to be validated by our cosmological reformulation of his proof in Chapter 4. It will be shown that this alternative Stage Two argument likewise can be validated by our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof. That will provide further

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confirmation that appealing to modern cosmology to reformulate his proof accords with Anselm's own metaphysical insights.

1 Gaunilo's Misunderstanding of Anselm's Stage One Argument

The argument which Gaunilo parodies in *On Behalf of the Fool* VI is not the same as the argument which Anselm's wrote in *Proslogion* II. Rather, as Geo Siegwart has emphasized:

> the object of Gaunilo's criticism and parody is constituted by the reasoning in [*Proslogion* II] as *Gaunilo understands it*; and exactly this understanding is documented by Gaunilo in [*On Behalf of the Fool* I].[1]

Siegwart has demonstrated that all the sentences in the parody which Gaunilo presents in *On Behalf of the Fool* VI agree with respect to their argumentative status with the sentences in his account of Anselm's argument in Chapter 1 of his *On Behalf of the Fool*.[2]

Gaunilo begins his tract by quoting the first phase of Anselm's Stage One accurately enough. But his summary of the second phase is inaccurate because he omits all Anselm's references to what 'can be thought', despite the fact that that phrase is crucial to the logic of Anselm's argument. Instead, Gaunilo converts Anselm's referring expression, "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" into "that which is greater than everything". As a result, he seriously misrepresents the logic of Anselm's argumentation. He also omits Anselm's inference, "*For if it is solely in the understanding, it can be thought to be also in reality, which is greater*", and the contradiction he reports is different from the one Anselm derives.

It is therefore not surprising that in *Reply* V Anselm responds to Gaunilo's account by writing:

> *Firstly, you often repeat that I say that that which is greater than everything is in the understanding, and if it is in the understanding, it is also in reality, for otherwise what is greater than everything would not be greater than everything. Such a proof cannot be found anywhere in all of my statements.*

1 Siegwart, 'Gaunilo parodies Anselm – An Extraordinary Job for the Interpreter', *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy*, 17 (2014), pp. 45–71, at p. 48.

2 Siegwart, 'Gaunilo parodies Anselm', p. 64.

> *For "greater than everything" and "that than which a greater cannot be thought" do not have the same force for proving that what is said is in reality.*

2 Introducing Gaunilo's Lost Island

Gaunilo believed that he had identified what is wrong with the argument in *Proslogion* II: it proves too much! In *Proslogion* II Anselm supposes that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding – which presupposes that it is not in reality – and validly deduces that it is in reality. Gaunilo's point is if that is a valid inference, it will also be valid to deduce that other things, which are known not to exist, nevertheless do exist. Many commentators assess Gaunilo's parody as having effectively exposed the invalidity of Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II.

Gaunilo introduces his parody by asking in *On Behalf of the Fool* V, "How is it proved to me that this greater thing truly subsists in reality?" He insists that:

> First of all, it is necessary that I am shown that that which is greater than any true thing exists somewhere, and only then, from the fact that it is greater than everything, will it be established that it also subsists in itself.

He then writes in *On Behalf of the Fool* VI that:

> For example, certain people affirm that there is in the Ocean somewhere an island, which because of the difficulty – or, rather, the impossibility – of discovering what does not exist, some call 'lost'. And the story is that it is reported to be blessed with all manner of inestimable riches and delights in abundance, in much greater quantity than the Happy Islands. And, having no owner or inhabitant, the surfeit of things to be possessed in every way excels that of all the lands which men occupy.

This counter-example is universally referred to as "Gaunilo's Island", as if it were his own invention, but John Demetracopoulos has suggested that it is probably a version of the widespread ancient legend of the lost island of Atlantis.[3] He

3 Plato describes Atlantis (through the character of Critias in his dialogue *Timaeus*) in exalted terms as a strong state located on a prosperous island somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean and larger than Libya and Asia Minor put together. Critias tells a story which, he says, had been passed down in his family. Plato takes up the story again in a later dialogue named *Critias*, who launches into a long and highly detailed description of the island and its people. Whether Plato invented this story simply as an allegory to warn Athens and other city-states

points out that the verb with which Gaunilo introduces this island, "*Aiunt* …" [affirm], is one of the characteristic Latin verbs used by narrators or historians to report something they have heard of or read. The verbs "*ferunt*" [report] and "*fabulantur*" [relate], which also occur in this passage, are typically used in a similar way. Demetracopoulos says:

> So the introductory verb implies that it is not a philosophical example produced by the author's imagination, but a just-so story borrowed from a source unknown to the modern reader.[4]

He cites references to Atlantis in a number of writings to which Gaunilo would have had access, and comments that Atlantis is the only island mentioned in ancient Greek and Latin literature with the qualities Gaunilo attributes to his 'Lost Island': inestimable riches and delights in abundance.

Howbeit, Gaunilo's contention is that Anselm's argumentation can be mimicked to demonstrate that, nevertheless, this island, is not lost, but exists in reality – despite the impossibility of discovering something which does not exist. That contention is relevant whether Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II is misinterpreted as his argument for the existence of God, or as Stage One of his three-stage argument. And it is also relevant to the reformulated arguments in Chapter 4 because it is possible to instantiate the comparison in (4:16) with Gaunilo's formula instead of Anselm's. If Gaunilo's parody survives scrutiny, it would show that a false conclusion can be deduced from Anselm's premises with what seems to be a minor alteration. That would be fatal to any Anselmian proof of the existence of God.

3 Assessing Gaunilo's Parody

Since the point of Gaunilo's parody is to demonstrate that Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II is fallacious, for any such parody to succeed, whatever is chosen as the counter-example has to satisfy two requirements: (a) it must be something other than God; and (b) the inferences about it must be an exact parallel to those which Anselm makes. However, there are a number of significant

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of the dangers of *hubris*, or whether he was embroidering some historical events has been debated ever since.

4 John Demetracopoulos, 'The Monk Gaunilo of Marmoutier: Inventor of a Philosophical Example or Latent User of an Ancient Tradition', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd Series, 37 (1996), pp. 329–36, at p. 332.

respects in which Gaunilo's parody differs from Anselm's Stage One argument. His parody satisfies the first requirement, but fails in a number of significant respects in which to satisfy the second requirement. For that reason, there is no point in reconstructing it as a formal deduction. A few comments will suffice.

Having written the passage quoted above Gaunilo writes:

> Should someone say to me that this is so, I would easily understand what is said, since it contains nothing difficult to understand.

He continues by supposing that the teller of this story might add:

> You can no more doubt that that island, which is more excellent than all lands, truly exists somewhere in reality, than you can doubt that it is also in your understanding.

That is enough to establish that "An island more excellent than all lands is in the understanding". But since that is an indefinite description, it is necessary to introduce an assumption which echoes that proposition but has as its subject a singular term which refers to an instance of that indefinite description. Gaunilo may call that "the Lost Island". So, he has to be assuming that:

> The Lost Island is more excellent than all lands and it is in the understanding.

Gaunilo then imagines that the person who has told this story would argue as follows:

> And since it is more excellent to be not solely in the understanding, but also in reality, therefore it is necessary that it is [in reality] because, unless it had been in reality, whatever other land is in reality will be more excellent than it, and this island, which has been understood to be more excellent will not be the more excellent.

There are a number of problems with Gaunilo's inferring that contradiction.

Firstly, not only has Gaunilo substituted "more excellent than other lands" for Anselm's "than which a greater cannot be thought", he has omitted the phrase "can be thought" altogether from the subsequent inferences. Consequently, what Gaunilo is comparing is significantly different from what Anselm is comparing.

Secondly, whereas Anselm argues that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought itself would be greater if *it* were in reality than if *it* were solely in the understanding, Gaunilo invokes a quite general premise which is not in Anselm's text:

> It is more excellent to be not solely in the understanding, but also in reality.

He then instantiates that premise as implying:

> If the Lost Island were to be only in the understanding, some other land which exists in reality would be greater than it.

The comparison which Anselm is making does not compare that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with anything else; he compares it if it were solely in the understanding with *itself* if it were in reality, as can be thought.

Thirdly, since Gaunilo has supposed that the Lost Island is more excellent than all lands, he infers the contradiction that:

> The island understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.

From that contradiction Gaunilo infers:

> It is necessary that the Lost Island exists in reality.

That is far too swift, for the contradiction which Anselm infers is quite different. It is

> *If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is solely in the understanding, that thing itself than which no greater can be thought is* [something] *than which a greater can be thought.*

That is not all that is wrong with Gaunilo's parody. Gaunilo negates the proposition "The Lost Island is not in reality" as the one responsible for generating the contradiction he infers because it is the proposition parallel to the supposition which Anselm selects to negate in *Proslogion* II. But, when we step back to assess the validity of his argument, it is manifest that Gaunilo has selected the wrong proposition to negate. The rule of *reductio ad absurdum* permits one of the premises from which an absurdity has been deduced to be negated. But

that rule does not prescribe *which* premise is the one responsible for generating that absurdity; since that absurdity would have been deduced from more than one premise, the argument's author must choose which one to negate.

Now, for Gaunilo's parody to be effective, the proposition that "The Lost Island is not in reality" must be more than a supposition. It has been reported as a *known fact*, and must *remain a known fact* in order that the outcome of this parody is to entail the contradiction that the Lost Island is both in reality and not in reality. So the appropriate proposition to identify as responsible for generating the contradiction he has inferred is not "The Lost Island is not in reality". Instead, the appropriate proposition which Gaunilo should have negated is his description of the Lost Island as "more excellent than all other lands". Since it is a fact, and not just a supposition, that this island is not in reality, what validly follows from Gaunilo's argument is not that "It is necessary that the Lost Island is in reality", but that:

> It is not possible that the Lost Island is more excellent than all other lands.

And, of course, that conclusion is right. Although the Lost Island has been described as being blessed with all manner of inestimable riches and delights in abundance, in much greater quantity than the Happy Islands, since it does not exist, none of those delightful features is *actually* true of it; it is a fiction. So, what Gaunilo's argument actually demonstrates, is that the Lost Island is *not* more excellent than all other lands – although that is the very opposite of what he is purporting to demonstrate.

Even if we allow Gaunilo to negate the fact that the Lost Island in not in reality, and conclude that it is in reality, there is yet another invalidity in Gaunilo's argument. Since Gaunilo has claimed to deduce that consequence from the assumption that "The Lost Island is more excellent than all other lands and it is in the understanding", it is still dependent upon that assumption. Therefore his argument is not complete, nor could that assumption be validly discharged by reaffirming his conclusion as entailed by the proposition: "An island more excellent than all other lands is in the understanding", because his conclusion still mentions the Lost Island. Gaunilo must generalize the subject of his conclusion about the Lost Island if his argument is to be valid. Doing so yields:

> It is necessary that some island which is more excellent than all other lands is in reality.

That conclusion may now be reaffirmed as entailed by the proposition, "An island more excellent than all other lands is in the understanding".

But there is nothing contradictory about that conclusion. It might well be true! I expect that it would be highly unlikely that any consensus could ever be achieved concerning *which* land or island is the most excellent. But that is a practical problem, not a logical one. If ever it could be determined which island or land is the most excellent, Gaunilo's parody of Anselm's argument would establish that it is in reality. But there could not be any sustainable objection to that requirement. So even if the misuse of *reductio ad absurdum* is overlooked, when this other invalidity is repaired, his purported parody turns out not to be a parody at all!

4 Amending Gaunilo's Inferences to Mimic Anselm's

Since Gaunilo has omitted Anselm's key phrase "It can be thought that", let us see how Gaunilo's counter-argument would go if it were amended so that his inferences mimic Anselm's more closely while still deploying his counter-example, "this island which is more excellent than all other lands".

Since Gaunilo has said that the teller of this story has said that it cannot be doubted that that island is in the understanding, let us amend what he says next so that it becomes:

> If this island were solely in the understanding, it can nevertheless be thought that it is also in reality, which is greater.

This implication is missing from Gaunilo's parody. But because it is comparing this island with itself, under the two different conditions of being solely in the understanding and being also in reality, it is certainly closer to how Anselm was arguing than what Gaunilo said. Obviously Gaunilo was unaware that Anselm's comment, "which is greater" could be justified by invoking a definition of "greater than" and regarding it as good to exist. That is why he introduced the universal premise his wrongly attributes to Anselm: "It is more excellent to be not solely in the understanding, but also in reality". Let us forgive that, and see what does follow validly from the 'background premise' which Gaunilo presumed Anselm was invoking:

> It is more excellent to be not solely in the understanding, but also in reality.

Instantiating that presumed 'background premise' yields:

> If this island were in reality, then it would be more excellent than if it were solely in the understanding.

This is comparable to what Anselm had inferred at this juncture. Anselm's next move is to apply his Distributing Conceivability rule to his comparison. Applying that rule to Gaunilo's comparison yields:

> If it can be thought that this island were in reality, then it can be thought that it is more excellent than if it were solely in the understanding.

Since Gaunilo's parody has been amended to include that the implication, "If this island were solely in the understanding, it can nevertheless be thought that it is also in reality", it follows that:

> If this island were in reality, then it can be thought that it is more excellent than if it were solely in the understanding.

But the consequent of that implication is not a contradiction. In fact, it is true. Since mimicking Anselm's inferences has not produce the contradiction which Anselm's original argument has, this attempt to mimic Anselm's argument more closely, while still deploying his counter-example, has come to a shuddering halt. Gaunilo's conclusion cannot be inferred.

We know that this is how Anselm interpreted Gaunilo's parody, because in *Reply* V he argues that if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were able not to exist, it would not be [something] than which a greater cannot be thought, and then comments:

> *However, this does not appear to be so easy to prove concerning what is said to be greater than everything* [else].

It has just been demonstrated how right is that remark. Anselm then conducts a thought-experiment in which he investigates what Gaunilo's parody needs so that it would validly entail that what is greater than everything else exists in reality. What he has to say about that thought-experiment will be examined in §11.5.2.

5 Anselm's First Reason for Rejecting Gaunilo's Parody

We saw in §7.1 that in *Reply* V Anselm dismissed Gaunilo's parody because the phrase "greater than everything" is not the phrase he uses in *Proslogion* II. But that is not his main objection to this alleged counter-example. He devotes the whole of *Reply* III to refuting Gaunilo's parody.

Anselm begins *Reply* III by summarizing Gaunilo's objection, and then gives his main reason for being totally unimpressed by Gaunilo's counter-example, declaring:

> *I say confidently that if anyone should discover for me* [something] *which either exists in reality or in thought alone in addition to* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, to which he could apply the logic of this argumentation, I shall discover the lost island and give* [it] *to him, to be lost no more.*

Almost all of those who discuss Gaunilo's parody cite only this passage as Anselm's response. It appears that they have not noticed that the rest of *Reply* III is devoted to arguing that Gaunilo's parody is impossible.

What Anselm is claiming in this first response is that the logic of his argumentation applies only to this one case. Nothing other than the phrase "*than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought*" entails its own existence. Thereby, he is insisting that his Stage One argument is unique.

But because this response does not engage with the detail of Gaunilo's disproof, Anselm is often accused of failing to understand just how serious is Gaunilo's challenge. To cite just a few examples, Donald Gregory, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, Graham Oppy, and Brian Garrett all believe that the case of the Lost Island shows that Anselm's argument is fallacious.[5] For while some of these critics concede that Gaunilo's parody differs from Anselm's in some respects, they contend that Gaunilo's description of his Lost Island can easily be amended so that it is *exactly* parallel to Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II.

It is surprising to read the emotionally-laden language in which some of these commentators couch their assessment of Anselm's response, so convinced are they that Gaunilo has devised an effective disproof. Many of them are scornful of his confident assertion that his argumentation is unique. They accuse him of missing the point. They condemn him for failing to understand just how devastating Gaunilo's parody is. Since they assess Gaunilo's

5 See, respectively, Donald R. Gregory, 'On behalf of the second-rate philosopher: a defense of the Gaunilo strategy against the ontological argument', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1:1 (1984), pp. 49–60; Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'In Defense of Gaunilo's Defense of the Fool', in C. Stephen Evans and Merold Westphal (eds.), *Christian Perspectives on Religious Knowledge*, pp 87–111; Visser & Williams, *Anselm*; Graham Oppy, 'Objection to a simplified ontological argument', *Analysis*, 71:1 (2011), pp. 105–6 and 'On Behalf of the Fool', *Analysis*, 71:2 (2011), pp. 304–306; Brian Garrett, 'On Behalf of Gaunilo', *Analysis*, 73:3 (2013), pp. 481–82.

counter-example as delivering a fatal blow to Anselm's argument, they censure him for responding in this way.

The most scathing criticism along these lines has been made by Nicholas Wolterstorff. His damning assessment is regularly cited with approval. He rightly comments that "To defend himself, Anselm has to point out why the finest conceivable island argument is not a good analogue".[6] But he adds: "He does nothing of the sort. Instead he blusters". Wolterstorff reports that Anselm makes only two references to Gaunilo's Lost Island in his *Reply* and in neither place does he provide what Wolterstorff regards as a reason to think that Gaunilo's counter-example is not a good analogy to his own argument in *Proslogion* II. Dismissing Anselm's explicit claim, in the quotation above, that his descriptive phrase has a unique application, Wolterstorff says that he can think of only two possible reasons which might explain why Anselm failed to reject the analogy.

The first possible explanation he considers is that Anselm was being "too kind" to point out exactly why Gaunilo's descriptive phrase is not analogous to his own descriptive phrase, as he implies. But then, Wolterstorff says,

> Why the bluster? Why the sarcasm? If charity to the befuddled Gaunilo inspired Anselm's silence concerning the point of disanalogy, what inspired his sharp bluster?

The other possible explanation Wolterstorff offers is that perhaps Anselm realized that there was *no* disanalogy to point out, and so had no answer to the objection. That is certainly incorrect. Anselm did indeed have three distinct answers to the objection; they are all in *Reply* III, as will be shown. Nevertheless, this damning assessment of Anselm's response to Gaunilo's counter-example has been applauded and warmly endorsed.

Even some of Anselm's defenders agree that his response is not very effective, but excuse him on the grounds that Gaunilo has misrepresented Anselm's descriptive phrase. For example, Ermanno Bencivenga, who argues that an island than which no greater island could be conceived is not an island, nevertheless introduces his defence by commenting that Anselm's response "seems to be nothing more than an arrogant, flat denial". He asserts as a fact that "Anselm is known to provide quite an unsatisfactory response to [Gaunilo's objection]".[7]

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6 Wolterstorff, 'In Defense of Gaunilo's Defense'.

7 Ermanno Bencivenga, 'A Note on Gaunilo's Lost Island', *Dialogue*, 46 (2007), pp. 583–87.

Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams find the Lost Island argument "so vivid and memorable" and also concede that Anselm's rejoinder "looks remarkably unresponsive".[8] They report:

> Other interpreters, less sympathetic, note Anselm's failure to respond to the Lost Island objection and argue that Anselm knew Gaunilo's objection was devastating but could not bring himself to acknowledge it in print.[9]

They describe Wolterstorff's contribution as "a powerful case" and "a forceful defense".[10] Since they are, on the whole, sympathetic to Anselm's project, they import considerations from the *Reply* into the *Proslogion* II argument in order to save it from being vulnerable to Gaunilo's parody. We shall see that that is quite unnecessary.

Likewise, John Marenbon reports:

> Gaunilo is often taxed with not having properly understood Anselm's reasoning, while Anselm, in turn, is certainly guilty of answering Gaunilo's strongest arguments inadequately.[11]

After summarizing the objection, he finishes by writing:

> The onus, then, is on Anselm to show why the substitute formula changes the argument and makes it unacceptable. But Anselm merely asserts … that there is nothing at all which can be substituted for that than which nothing greater can be thought and preserve the cogency of the argument.[12]

So Marenbon is yet another commentator who has not noticed that the rest of *Reply* III is devoted to arguing that Gaunilo's parody is impossible. He comments that later philosophers have come to Anselm's rescue by arguing that it does not make sense to describe a spatiotemporal thing or any specific sort of thing (an island, a palace or whatever) as such that a greater cannot be thought, because it is impossible to say what characteristics would belong to the greatest

8 Visser & Williams, *Anselm*, p. 77.
9 Visser & Williams, *Anselm*, p. 78.
10 Visser & Williams, *Anselm*, p. 78.
11 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 189, citing Wolterstorff"s critique.
12 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 189.

conceivable thing. But he finishes his assessment inconclusively, simply noting that "it is still a matter of debate whether these answers are satisfactory".[13]

There is a reason why these debates have not achieved satisfactory answers to that question. Both sides of these debates entirely miss the issue which is central to determining whether Gaunilo's parody is an effective counter-example to Anselm's proof. They accuse him of failing to respond to Gaunilo's parody, when they themselves have failed to notice that he has three distinct responses in which he demonstrates that Gaunilo's parody is impossible.

What is so unsatisfactory about these debates is that the participants on both sides (with one exception) say nothing which indicates that they have even read the text past Anselm's first response. Yet Anselm himself has identified in his second and third responses to Gaunilo's parody in *Reply* III the key reason why Gaunilo's parody fails. For it only needs to be understood that Anselm's argument for the existence of God proceeds in the three stages articulated in §1.6 in order to understand why the logic of his argumentation could not apply to anything other than God.

It is not difficult to explain why that is so. Having proven in Stage One that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, Anselm extends that argument to prove in Stage Two that this same thing so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, as we have seen. He has not yet established uniqueness of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought by the end of Stage Two, but that is secured in Stage Three. For, as I explained in §1.6.3, his Stage Three premise – "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist" – ensures the uniqueness of *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and that that description is true only of God. Anselm's insistence that his argumentation could not be applied to prove the existence of anything other than God is justified by his three-stage argument.

I suspect that the reason why only the first of Anselm's three responses is regularly cited is because of the widespread ignorance about how *Proslogion* III is relevant to the argument in *Proslogion* II. No doubt, the rest of Anselm's response in *Reply* III is ignored because of the widespread acceptance of the misinterpretation of Anselm's proof of the existence of God as wholly contained in *Proslogion* II, where it is construed as a version of the 'ontological argument'. These criticisms demonstrate just how effectively a wrongful pre-understanding blocks out a proper understanding of what is plainly written in the text. Although Gaunilo's parody is designed as a critique of Stage One of Anselm's argument for the existence of God, Anselm's response invokes what he had proven in Stage Two of his proof, as we shall see in §7.7 and §7.8.

13 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 190.

6 Amending Gaunilo's Description of the Lost Island

Many commentators have pointed out that the reasoning in Gaunilo's argument is not parallel to the reasoning in Anselm's Stage One. As we have seen in §7.1, Gaunilo models his parody on the inaccurate summary of Anselm's argument which Gaunilo himself wrote in his first section. Many defenders of Gaunilo acknowledge that and concede that his parody must be amended to make it effective. But they contend that it is quite simple to correct Gaunilo's mistake, and once it is, it becomes clear that the result is a devastatingly effective disproof.

Accordingly, they replace Gaunilo's descriptive phrase "an island which is more excellent than all other lands" with "an island than which a greater island cannot be thought". These modern defenders then claim that, once Gaunilo's phrase is 'tidied up' in this way, his counter-example can be reconstructed in a way which is *exactly* parallel to Anselm's argument. For example, Visser & Williams, who have written a generally sympathetic study of Anselm's thought, make that very assertion.[14]

All those who argue that when Gaunilo's phrase is amended in that way it is effective as a disproof of Anselm's argument in *Proslogion* II are implicitly assuming, as does Gaunilo, that Anselm's so-called formula may be reworded in that way. However, that assumption is never expressed. Yet transparency requires that all background assumptions must be explicitly articulated. Once this implicit assumption is pointed out, as I did in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, it is obvious that not only Gaunilo, but also all those who support amending Anselm's descriptive phrase, are assuming that:

> It is legitimate to amend the phrase, "Something than which a greater cannot be thought", so that it becomes: "Some island than which a greater island cannot be thought".

When Gaunilo's phrase is amended in that way, the description "than which a greater [island] cannot be thought" ensures that the argumentation in *Proslogion* II entails the conclusion:

> There exists, beyond doubt, an island than which a greater island cannot be thought, both in the understanding and in reality.

14 Visser & Williams, *Anselm*, p, 77.

That is what the modern defenders of Gaunilo conclude. Both he, and his latter-day defenders, infer that because Anselm's reasoning entails that the Lost Island *is* in reality, when it is known *not* to be in reality, there must be a fallacy in Anselm's reasoning. So, Gaunilo's defenders say that this contradictory outcome is decisive: Anselm's argument is invalid. For it has been demonstrated that his premises and argumentative strategy permit a false conclusion to be deduced from premises which are all supposed to be true.

Although I have not set out the deduction of this conclusion rigorously, it is valid. For it can be validly deduced from the background assumption stated above, the premise "Some-island-than-which-a-greater-island-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding", and the definition of "greater than" and the premise that "*Ceteris paribus*, to be in reality is good", that:

> It is necessary that some-island-than-which-a-greater-island-cannot-be-thought is in reality.[15]

Gaunilo's defenders therefore point out that Anselm's challenge to find another argument to which the logic of his argumentation applies has now been met. For they argue that when Gaunilo's descriptive phrase is amended in that way, the ensuing argument is parallel to Anselm's and entails that an island than which no greater island can be thought does exist when it is known not to exist. Not only do Anselm's critics regard this as decisively refuting Anselm's Stage One argument, but also even some of his defenders concede that it is the most damaging objection to that argument.

7 Anselm's Second Reason for Rejecting Gaunilo's Parody

The confidence with which Gaunilo is declared to be vindicated shows that it has not been noticed that Anselm has already anticipated the proposal articulated in §7.6, and has already refuted it. For it is patently untrue to say that Anselm arrogantly dismisses Gaunilo's parody without taking it seriously. Almost exclusively, the critics focus on Anselm's first response, where he issues the challenge quoted in §7.5, claiming that the logic of his argumentation can only be applied to the phrase "than which a greater cannot be thought". But,

15 In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* it was demonstrated on pp. 308–312 that once Gaunilo's description of the Lost Island is amended in this way it entails that conclusion, although in that book I used an amended version of Eder and Ramharter's definition of "greater than" and their definition of Essential Identity to deduce that conclusion.

contrary to what the critics allege, the passage quoted in §7.5 is *not* all that Anselm has to say on the matter, for he writes next:

> *Moreover, it has already been seen plainly that* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought, which exists by such certain reasoning of truth, could not be thought not to exist. Otherwise it would in no way exist.*

There are three significant claims in this second passage. The first is that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists "by such certain logic and truth". By that comment, Anselm indicates his confidence that he has proven that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists. He is entitled to be confident of that.

When I say that Anselm is entitled to be confident that he has proven that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists "by such certain logic and truth", I presume that he is not relying on his having presented a valid argument in *Proslogion* II, for that would beg the question. I presume that instead he is relying on the reformulated Stage One arguments he presented in *Reply* I. It has been shown in Chapter 5 that those arguments are not only valid, but also the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's Stage One argument in Chapter 4 demonstrates that their premises are justified. While I take Anselm's intent to show that in the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought it is valid to infer that it exists from its being thought, there is no room for doubt that it can be thought. For not only has Anselm explained how in *Reply* VIII, but also it was shown in §3.4 that it is possible that it exists.

Anselm's second claim is that:

> *It has already been seen plainly that* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought … could not be thought not to exist.*

His point is stunningly simple. Anselm is here quoting the interim conclusion of Stage Two of his proof. It follows from Anselm's Conceivability Principle that, since the Lost Island does not exist – for Gaunilo has said that that is a known fact – it *can* be thought not to exist. Therefore, it cannot be something than which a greater cannot be thought. He has demonstrated that in Stage Two of his proof. That simple inference explains why the logic of his argumentation cannot be applied to anything which can be thought not to exist, such as the Lost Island.

Anselm's third claim is "*Otherwise it would in no way exist*". It is understandable why commentators have not made anything of that remark; it does seem offhand. However, what Anselm is claiming by that remark is that:

> *If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, it would not exist at all.*

This claim is the contrapositive of, and therefore equivalent to, the claim he had already made in *Reply* 1, where he had written:

> *But* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, if it exists. For otherwise, if it exists, it is not* [something] *than which a greater could not be thought, which is not consistent.*

When Anselm writes that small passage in *Reply* 1 that is all he says; he does not explain why that implication is true. He was probably relying on his Stage Two argument in *Proslogion* 111. I have argued in §6.1 that there is only one way of construing the clause by which he asserts his Stage Two premise so that it validly entails the conclusion of that stage. The subject of that premise must refer to the subject of the conclusion of Stage One. Moreover, it was demonstrated in Chapter 6 that his premise entails that:

> (6:37) If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.

That demonstrates that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist, *if it exists*.

So, Anselm's second response to Gaunilo's parody is that since it follows by his Conceivability Principle that the Lost Island both *can* be thought not to exist, and *could not* be thought not to exist. So, an island than which a greater island cannot be thought it is impossible. Therefore, an island than which a greater cannot be thought could never be proven to exist, as Gaunilo and his latter-day defenders confusedly imagine it could.

To put the same point another way, it has been demonstrated in Chapter 4 that:

> (4:36) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* one of the observable things which exist in the universe.

So, *a fortiori*, it could not be an island. Far from having no effective response to Gaunilo's parody, Anselm has succeeded in demonstrating that Gaunilo's counter-example is impossible.

I pointed out in §7.6 that to amend Anselm's phrase "than which a greater cannot be thought" so that it becomes "an island than which a greater island cannot be thought" is to assume implicitly that it is legitimate to do so. But since Anselm has now shown that any such amendment generates contradictions, it follows by *reductio ad absurdum*, that:

> It cannot be legitimate to amend the phrase – "Something than which a greater cannot be thought" – so that it becomes: "Some island than which a greater island cannot be thought".

I am aware of only one commentator who has even noticed what Anselm has written after expressing his confidence that the logic of his argumentation could not be applied to anything other than [something]-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Thomas Ward has recognized that Anselm repeats the conclusion of Stage Two in *Proslogion* III, which he reports as "That the greatest conceivable being cannot be conceived not to exist". He then comments:

> From the context we must assume that Anselm took this restatement to be relevant to formulating a response to the Objection. But it is not obvious how it is relevant.[16]

By commenting that it is not obvious how Anselm's second response is relevant, Ward shows that he has not understood that Anselm's proof of the existence of God proceeds in three stages across *Proslogion* II and III, and so has not appreciated the full force of that response.

Unfortunately, Ward interprets Anselm's rejoinder as "Anselm means to imply that if we add *greatest conceivable* to *island*, we cannot formulate a valid argument that such an island is necessary". I say "unfortunately" because Anselm carefully distinguishes between what *cannot* be *thought not to exist* and what *exists necessarily*. His Conceivability rule ensures that the former entails the latter, but not *vice versa*.

Ward shows that the argument in *Proslogion* III can be parodied just as easily as the one in *Proslogion* II, just by conjoining the word "island" with "than which a greater cannot be thought". But he asserts that "Anselm is right

16 Thomas M. Ward, 'Losing the Lost Island', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 83 (2018), pp. 127–34. We have seen in Chapter 6 that "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist" is the *interim* conclusion of Stage Two, not its *actual* conclusion.

to imply that the greatest conceivable island just does not have necessary existence". His point is that:

> the greatest conceivable island, being by nature made of land, will by nature be corruptible, and therefore ineligible for the property of necessary existence.

While Ward's points are correct enough so far as they go, his simplistic equation of "what cannot be thought not to exist" and "what exists necessarily" is unsound, and he offers no justification for why something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would not exist at all if it can be thought not to exist, which is the very point Anselm is making. He takes Anselm's strategy against Gaunilo's Lost Island Objection to be:

> to identify features of island-nature which won't let 'island' function in Gaunilo's Objection the way 'being' functions in Anselm's Argument. One such feature is the intrinsic corruptibility of complex material objects, which entails that such objects are not necessary beings.[17]

Very properly, Ward is looking for:

> a difference which will give us a principled reason for rejecting Gaunilo's parody argument for the *existence* of the Lost Island, not its necessity, while accepting Anselm's argument for God's existence.

He fails to recognize that the very passage he has been discussing is the 'principled reason' for which he is seeking.

It has already been shown that Anselm does have a principled reason for rejecting Gaunilo's parody, but it does not have anything specifically to do with islands. The point is that if Gaunilo's counter-argument is to be effective as a parody of Anselm's *Proslogion* II argument, it is essential that something which is known not to exist – he chooses the Lost Island – can be described as something than which a greater cannot be thought. Anselm's Conceivability rule ensures that *anything* which is *able* not to exist *can be thought* not to exist. Yet Anselm has established in Stage Two, and reiterated both in the passage in *Reply* I and the *Reply* III passage under discussion, that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist *if it exists*. It is

17 Ward, 'Losing the Lost Island', p. 131. I have added the quotation marks to make the sentence clearer.

therefore not possible that anything which is able not to exist, such as an island, could be something than which a greater cannot be thought, even if it exists. That was also demonstrated in §4.9.

Looking for 'a principled reason' for rejecting Gaunilo's parody but having missed the principled reason which Anselm himself has stated, Ward instead 'homes in' on Alvin Plantinga's objection that most of the qualities which make for greatness in islands have no intrinsic maximum.[18] Plantinga has argued that God's 'great-making qualities' (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness) are maximal. But, on the contrary, most of the qualities that make for greatness in islands – number of palm trees, amount and quality of coconuts, for example – have no intrinsic maximum.[19]

Ever since Plantinga published that defense of Anselm's argument in 1974 there have been sporadic debates about whether islands could have intrinsically maximal qualities, or not. To my mind, the issue whether islands have maximal qualities is a peripheral issue. I shall not comment further on those debates because the central issue is the one which Anselm himself has identified: It is *impossible* that anything which can be thought not to exist could be something than which a greater cannot be thought.

That principled reason invites another question: Could anything other than God be something which could not be thought not to exist? If the answer is "No", then *nothing* other than God is something than which a greater cannot be thought. And, as has been foreshadowed, Anselm's answer is "No!", because the crucial premise of Stage Three of his proof of the existence of God is "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist".

Gaunilo seems to have been dimly aware that Anselm might respond in this way, for having presented his parody in *On Behalf of the Fool* VI he comments in the following section:

> If next it is asserted that such a greater thing exists, so that it cannot be in thought alone, and this is proven again by no other means than from the assertion that otherwise it will not be greater than everything, he can make the same response once more and say: "But when did I say that there truly exists in reality such a thing that is greater than everything, so that from this it might also be proved that it so exists in reality that it cannot be thought not to exist?"

This is made more confusing than it need be by Gaunilo's repeated use of the description "greater than everything". But I take it that he is trying to anticipate

18 Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*.

19 Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 90–1.

and head off a possible response which Anselm might make on the basis of Stage Two, as indeed Anselm did. That is, he is insisting that his parody relates only to Stage One, and what Anselm has argued in Stage Two is simply not relevant. Gaunilo is assuming that the argument in *Proslogion* II does not imply that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.

That assumption is false. It was shown in §6.2 how the argument in Stage One entails that it is necessary that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, and that in turn entails the premise of Stage Two. Gaunilo cannot coherently mimic Anselm's reasoning in *Proslogion* II but deny that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it is not possible that it can be thought not to exist. That implication is what Anselm is asserting in this second response by citing the contrapositive of what he had said in *Reply* I. For the same premises which entail that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality also entail that that same thing could not be thought not to exist. That holds true both in the three-stage proof Anselm presented in the *Proslogion*, and in the cosmological reformulation of that proof. The logical necessity of that entailment is sufficient to sink Gaunilo's island.

8 Anselm's Third Reason for Rejecting Gaunilo's Parody

Anselm does not, however, leave his rejection of this parody resting just on that second brief riposte. He presses the point home by offering a third response which engaging closely with Gaunilo's proposal, including a sketch of a new argument which validates his second response.

In the passage discussed in §7.7 Anselm has assumed that Gaunilo is intending his Lost Island to be something than which a greater cannot be thought. That is a reasonable assumption, for otherwise it could not be a relevant counterexample. But now Anselm takes one step back.

He acknowledges that he has read that assumption into what Gaunilo has written. Thereby he shows himself to be sensitive to the possible objection that he has misunderstood what Gaunilo has argued. So, he considers two alternative interpretations of what Gaunilo meant his island to be:

(i) that Gaunilo meant his island to be exactly what he described it as "an island which is more excellent than all other lands", or
(ii) that Gaunilo actually intended his Lost Island to be something than which a greater cannot be thought, but misdescribed it.

Since Anselm has recognized that there are these two different ways of interpreting what Gaunilo meant his Lost Island to be, he continues:

> *Lastly, if someone says that he is thinking that that thing* [illud] *does not exist, I say that when he is thinking of this, he either is thinking, or is not thinking, of something than which a greater cannot be thought. If he is not thinking of it, he is not thinking that what he is not thinking of does not exist. But if he is thinking of it, he undoubtedly is thinking of something which cannot be thought not to exist.*

I admit that this passage is not the clearest Anselm has ever written, but a little deliberation shows that it is precisely apt.

When Anselm writes in that first sentence: "If someone says that he is thinking that that thing [*illud*] does not exist", he does not describe 'that thing' as the Lost Island. That he does not make that reference explicit might be cited to excuse the fact that all the commentary on Anselm's response ignores the argument he is about to mount. But if one reads the text of *Reply* III carefully, it can be seen that there is nothing to which the phrase, "that thing", could refer other than Gaunilo's island. So that excuse is not sufficient to exonerate all those who ignore this passage. When Anselm writes that phase, he is referring to Gaunilo's claim that his parody is about "an island, which because of the difficulty – or, rather, the impossibility – of discovering what does not exist, some call 'lost'".

By distinguishing those two different interpretations of Gaunilo' counter-example. Anselm is invoking the following disjunction, which is an instance of the Law of Excluded Middle:

> (1) If this person says that he is thinking that that thing [i.e., the Lost Island] does not exist, *either* this person is thinking of something than which a greater cannot be thought, *or* he is not.

Anselm is right to distinguish those two possible interpretations, since the wording of Gaunilo's counter-example leaves it quite ambiguous. His phrase does *not* echo Anselm's descriptive phrase, which is why it had to be amended in §7.6. But for the parody to be relevant as a disproof it *must* echo Anselm's descriptive phrase.

Anselm is far from being arrogant; he is being respectful and thorough by considering each of those two alternative interpretations. Since Gaunilo has not made it clear whether this island is supposed to be something than which

a greater cannot be thought, or not, he is engaging at close quarters with Gaunilo's parody and is drawing out the implications of each. With his typically sharp mind, Anselm is posing a Constructive Dilemma in which he will consider each alternative in turn, but in the reverse order.

Firstly, he considers the second possible alternative posed by this constructive dilemma. He writes:

> *If he is not thinking of it, he is not thinking that what is he is not thinking of does not exist.*

By considering this alternative interpretation, Anselm is charitably allowing for the possibility that he might have misinterpreted what Gaunilo was meaning to say. That is a quite cryptic assertion, but what he is claiming becomes clear enough once we think about it. I submit that what he is asserting is:

(2) If this person is *not* thinking that that thing – that is, the Lost Island – is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then, when he asserts that it does not exist, he is not thinking that what he is *not* thinking of – that is, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – does not exist.

What follows from (2) is that:

(3) If this person is *not* thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought, what he *is* thinking of is irrelevant to Anselm's Stage One argument.

On this interpretation, since the alleged counter-example is different from Anselm's descriptive phrase, Gaunilo's Lost Island fails even to be a parody of Anselm's Stage One argument.

Anselm then considers the other possible interpretation posed by the constructive dilemma: that 'that thing' is what it would have to be if it is to constitute a potential counter-example to Anselm's Stage One argument, namely, an island than which a greater island cannot be thought. He writes:

> *If instead* [vero] *he is thinking of it, he is certainly* [utique] *thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist.*

What Anselm is claiming on this alternative hypothesis is clear enough:

> If this person *is* thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought, what he is thinking of is something which *could not* be thought not to exist.

That sounds like a bare assertion. It seems that Anselm is simply objecting to the very possibility that there could be an island than which no greater island could be thought. Not so! When we read on, we see that the next sentence Anselm writes gives *the reason why* it is certain that this person is thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist. He writes:

> *For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end.*

This claim will be examined in the following section, as will the comment which he immediately adds. What is pertinent here is to set out step-by-step the second leg of the Constructive Dilemma which Anselm is constructing. It begins with the hypothesis which is opposite of that in (2):

(4) This person *is* thinking that that thing – that is, the Lost Island – is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Anselm then asserts what has been quoted above:

(5) If something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end.

Anselm immediately adds: "*But this is not possible*". That is:

(6) It is not possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to have a beginning and an end.

Assuming the truth of (6), Anselm infers that:

> *Therefore, he who is thinking of this is thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist*.

His inference is valid, because it follows from (5) and (6), by *modus tollens*, that:

(7) It is not possible that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

Anselm then writes:

> *Clearly, he who is thinking of this is not thinking that the thing itself does not exist. Otherwise he is thinking what cannot be thought.*

That inference is also valid. For it follows from (4) and (7), by Conditional Proof, that:

(8) If this person *is* thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought, it is not possible that it can be thought not to exist.

Because Anselm understands "It is not possible that … can …" to be equivalent to "… could not …", (8) is equivalent to:

(9) If this person *is* thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought, it could not be thought not to exist.

So Anselm was right to claim that:

> *If instead he is thinking of it* [i.e., something than which a greater cannot be thought], *he is certainly thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist.*

And since, as (8) says, it is not possible that that the Lost Island can be thought not to exist, the person whom Anselm has supposed to be thinking that the Lost Island does not exist, is trying to think what cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.

So, the first leg of this constructive dilemma has established that if the Lost Island is what Gaunilo said it is – something which is more excellent than all other lands – anyone who is thinking of that is *not* thinking of something than which a greater cannot be thought. So, it is irrelevant to Anselm's proof. The second leg has established that if someone is thinking that the Lost Island *is* something than which a greater cannot be thought, he could not be thinking that it does not exist. Since the consequent in (1) is a logical truth, it follows that:

(10) If someone is thinking that the Lost Island does not exist, then *either* what he *is* thinking of is irrelevant to Anselm's proof, or what he is thinking of is something which could be thought not to exist.

So Anselm has established, in the strongest way possible, that *either* Gaunilo's parody is irrelevant *or* it is based on a supposition which could not coherently be thought. Anselm himself has effectively refuted the amended version of Gaunilo's parody before it was even proposed.

9 What Could Not Be Thought to Have a Beginning or an End

The conclusion of the second leg of the dilemma set out above relies on Anselm's assertion that:

> *But if instead he is thinking of it, he is certainly thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist.*

But Anselm does not just *assert* that. He offers the impossibility asserted by (7) as the reason why something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist. That little argument can be justified.

Just as he did in §7.7 above, Anselm has taken it as already established that:

(11) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

But this argument does not require that (11) be true, only that it *can be thought* to be true. His Conceivability Principle, which was identified in §3.8, says:

(12) If *p*, it can be thought that *p*.

Substituting (11) for "*p*" in (12) yields:

(13) If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it can be thought to exist.

(13) will be required a little later in this justification of Anselm's claim.

As noted in §4.6, there is one way in which something can both exist and not exist. For it was asserted as a logical truth in §4.6 on line (4) that:

(14) Anything both exists and does not exist if, and only if, it exists at some time, and does not exist at some other time.

The observable universe is full of such things because they all have a beginning. Gaunilo's Lost Island is but one of countless examples. So, when Anselm

is considering the interpretation which assumes that (4): "This person *is* thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought", he homes in on the fact that everything in the world, so far as he knows, has a beginning and an end. In particular, if Gaunilo's Lost island is the legendary island of Atlantis, it did indeed have a beginning and an end.

Howbeit, on this second interpretation, the Lost Island is supposed to be something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, but is known not to exist. Anselm's counter-argument is designed to show that that is not possible. To see why it is not possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could have a beginning and an end, let us investigate how that implication might be validated.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (14) yields:

(15) It can be thought that anything both exists and does not exist if, and only if, it can be thought to exist at some time and not to exist at some other time.

We today know that (15) is true of everything in the universe. So, if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, it is like everything which exists in the universe, for it has been shown in Chapter 4 that whatever exists in the universe at some time also does not exist at some other time. It follows by Anselm's Conceivability Principle, (12), that whatever exists in the universe can be thought not to exist. So, let us see what happens if we assume that the same is true of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Instantiating (15), as we may, it follows that:

(16) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist if, and only if, it can be thought to exist at some time and not to exist at some other time.

Considering that it can be proven that anything can be thought not to exist if, and only if, it does not exist at some time, that calls to mind the quasi-definition of having a beginning which was introduced in Chapter 4 on line (2). What seems like a reasonable definition of having a beginning had to be qualified because, according to modern cosmology, if the universe as whole had a beginning, there was no time when the universe did not exist. So, in §4.6, I proposed an amended version of that apparent conceptual truth which sets that exception aside:

(4:2) Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.

Although that qualification is required by an empirically based cosmological theory, that proposition otherwise has the force of a quasi-definition. That quasi-definition was introduced as the second premise of our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof because it is true, but not *a priori*.

But Anselm is asserting here that "If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning *and an end*". Since the same considerations apply to having an end as to having a beginning, that quasi-definition can be extended to encompass both having a beginning and an end. Like the problem of characterizing the beginning of the universe, if the universe as a whole should cease to exist, time and anything remaining in it would also cease at that final instant. There would no time 'after' the moment when the universe ceased to exist. So, the same qualification has to be applied to considering what it is to come to an end. So, extending that quasi-definition so that it defines what it is to have both a beginning and an end, it becomes:

(17) Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything has a beginning and an end if, and only if, it exists at some time, but does not exist at some previous time, and it does not exist at some later time.

Given that quasi-definition, it is possible to run an argument parallel to the first argument which Anselm presented in the *Reply* 1, which was discussed in §5.1. Instantiating (17) yields:

(18) That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning and an end if, and only if, it exists at some time, but it does not exist at some previous time, and it does not exist at some later time.

That conditional proposition (18) depends only on the quasi-definition (17). Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (18), it follows that:

(19) It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning and an end if, and only if, it can be thought that it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist, and there is a later time when it does not exist.

It follows from (16) and (19), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(20) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist, it can be thought to have both a beginning and an end.

Generalizing the subject of (20) yields:

(21) If it can be thought that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist, it can be thought to have both a beginning and an end.

Now, the antecedent of (21) supposes that "it can be thought that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both exists and does not exist", and it has already been inferred on line (13) that it can be thought to exist. So, it follows from (13) and (21), by *modus ponens*, that:

(22) If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought *not* to exist, it can be thought to have a beginning and an end.

It is a well-known rule of modal logic that it is valid to infer from "If *p* then *q*" that "If it is possible that *p*, it is possible that *q*". Applying that rule to (22) yields:

(23) If it is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, it is possible that it can be thought to have a beginning and an end.

Since Anselm understands "It is possible that … can …" to be equivalent to "… could …" (23) is equivalent to:

(24) If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end.

The deduction of (24) has justified the claim with which Anselm began this argument. Anselm next says that, "But this is not possible". In saying that, what he means is that the consequent in (24) is not possible, from which it follows that the antecedent of (24) is also not possible.

But why is the consequent of (24) not possible? Instead of answering that question, Anselm moves immediately to the conclusion he takes this argument to establish:

> *Therefore, he who is thinking of this* [i.e., is thinking of the Lost Island and assuming that it is something than which a greater cannot be thought], *is thinking of something which could not be thought not to exist.*

But that is too swift. His claim, "*But this is not possible*" also needs to be justified. However, in Chapter 4 it has been proven, independently of the argument in *Proslogion* II, that:

(25) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not one of the observable things in the universe.

That has been proven in §4.8 on line (35) from the four premises (4:1), (4:2) (4:5), and (4:6). The premise (4:1) of our Anselmian cosmological argument says that:

(26) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

Since "It is necessary that …" is equivalent to "It is not possible that … not …", it follows from (25) and (26), by *modus tollens*, that:

(27) It is not possible that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning.

It then follows from the quasi-definition (17) and (27), by *modus tollens*, that:

(28) It is not possible that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning and an end.

Now, it was shown in §3.7 that both Anselm and Gaunilo agree with the general principle (3:14) that:

(29) Whatever is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.

So, it follows from (28) and (29), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(30) It cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning and an end.

So Anselm was right to say that (24) is not possible, for (30) contradicts the consequent of (24). Therefore the antecedent of (24) is also not possible. For it follows from (24) and (30), by *modus tollens*, that:

(31) It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

As we have seen previously, Anselm understands "It is not possible that … can …" as equivalent to "… could not …". Taking that equivalence into account, (31) is equivalent to:

(32) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.

That conclusion is the same the interim conclusion of Stage Two of Anselm's *Proslogion* argument and the same as (6:39), which was proven in §6.3 from our cosmological premises. That same conclusion has been proven here also from the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, but in a quite different way from the proof in §6.3. So this argument reinforces the implication which Anselm asserted in *Reply* I because (32) demonstrates the truth of the first premise of that argument:

(5:20) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning.

A captious critic might be tempted to dismiss this justification of the argument Anselm advances in *Reply* III in rebuttal of Gaunilo's parody on the grounds that I have imported considerations from our Anselmian cosmological argument to supplement his reasoning. Lest any reader is so tempted, may I point out that since it is the soundness of Anselm's reasoning which is in dispute, that his reasoning is validated by an independent argument strengthens, rather than weakens, the case being made here. For it demonstrates the

soundness of the inferences which Anselm advances to refute Gaunilo's parody so effectively.

In *Reply* III Anselm then adds three comments:

> *Clearly, he who is thinking of this, is not thinking that this very thing does not exist. Otherwise, he is thinking what cannot be thought. Therefore,* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.*

Here again, just as at the beginning of this argument, when Anselm speaks of "he who is thinking of this", he is referring to someone who is thinking of Gaunilo's Lost Island. So what Anselm is declaring in these closing comments is:

> He who is thinking that the Lost Island is something than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thinking that this very thing does not exist, because something than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist. So, if it be insisted that this person is thinking that this very thing does not exist, he is thinking what cannot be thought.

Thus, by reiterating the interim conclusions of Stage Two of his proof, Anselm has justified his assertion that Gaunilo's Lost Island cannot be something than which a greater cannot be thought, since that island is supposed not to exist, whereas it is *not possible* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist. Thus whichever way his parody is interpreted, Gaunilo has failed to produce a counter-example to Anselm's *Proslogion* II argument.

Anselm's reasoning is surely sound; islands are the sort of thing which can be thought to have a beginning and an end. Since Gaunilo's counter-example is an island, there must have been places where, and times when, this island does not to exist; that is intrinsic to the nature of islands. And since it is *possible* that there is somewhere, and some time when, it does not exist, it can be thought not to exist.[20] That follows from his Conceivability rule. Indeed, Gaunilo has introduced it as something which could never be discovered, so it assuredly

20 Of course, if John Demetracopoulos' speculation that Gaunilo based his island on the legend of the lost island of Atlantis is correct, that island did actually exist at some time, but exists no more.

can be thought not to exist. Since Gaunilo's Lost Island can be thought not to exist, even when it is 'tidied up', it cannot serve as a counter-example to Anselm's argument.

Anselm has not arrogantly dismissed Gaunilo's parody, nor has he failed to understand it. I do not detect any hint of bluster and sarcasm. Rather, he has thoroughly and painstakingly shown how the logic of his argument entails the impossibility of Gaunilo's counter-example. Unlike both Gaunilo and Gaunilo's modern defenders, Anselm understands the logic of his own argumentation.

10 Generalizing Anselm's Refutation of Gaunilo's Parody

The prevailing misreading of *Proslogion* II is not the only reason why so many commentators have been predisposed not to recognize the relevance of the arguments Anselm advances in *Proslogion* III to his rejection of Gaunilo's counter-example. Another reason is the persistence of mistranslations of the premise Anselm announces at the beginning of *Proslogion* III. For as I argued in §6.1, the logic of his argument requires that the subject of that premise implicitly refers to the subject of the conclusion of *Proslogion* II, but all but two translations of the *Proslogion* published in English translate that sentence in a way which makes no such reference.

It has consequently been all too easy not to see the dependence of Stage Two upon Stage One, despite the two passages in the *Reply* discussed in §7.7. But this is a case of errors compounding errors. For we have already seen in §6.4 that the same set of premises which entails that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists also entails that it could not be thought not to exist. That is the case both with respect to the premises in Anselm's original Stage One, and also with respect to the premises in the cosmological reformulation of Stage One.

Because the defenders of Gaunilo never discuss Anselm's second and third responses to Gaunilo's parody, they confidently propose that that parody can be generalized. For example, Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams comment:

> If we tidy up Gaunilo's formulation, it seems that we have an argument exactly parallel to Anselm's. So if Anselm's argument proves the existence of a being than which a greater cannot be thought, Gaunilo's argument proves the existence of an island than which no greater can be thought. And there is nothing special about islands, of course: we could equally well prove the existence of a live oak than which a greater cannot be

> thought, a cockroach than which a greater cannot be thought, you name it.[21]

Visser and Williams are right to comment that there is nothing special about islands; a Gaunilo-style parody can be constructed to be about *anything* which is known not to exist. They therefore contend that *anything* which does not exist, would serve equally well to disprove Anselm's proof of the existence of God by calling it something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. The chosen counter-example could be anything which is other than God. So not only are Visser and Williams are explicitly endorsing the background assumption articulated in §7.6, but they are advocating that it may be expanded so as to read:

> (33) It is legitimate to amend the phrase, "Something than which a greater cannot be thought", so that it becomes: "Some *F* than which a greater *F* cannot be thought", where "some *F*" is anything other than God.

But however the chosen counter-example is described, Anselm's refutation suffices to show that it is impossible. That is inevitable, because, as was noted in §1.6.3, in Stage Three of his proof Anselm deduces that God exists from the premise:

> (34) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

It will be shown in §8.3 how Anselm derives the premise (34) from the first clause of the Nicene Creed, and it will be shown Chapter 10 how that premise can be justified even if it is assumed that the God describes in that creed does not exist. But to anticipate its validity, Anselm deduces in Stage Three, from that premise and the conclusion of Stage Two, that:

> (35) You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

If (35) is true, (33) is false. For it follows from (33) and (35), by *reductio ad absurdum*, that:

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21 Visser & Williams, *Anselm*, p. 77.

(36) It is *not* possible that it is legitimate to amend Anselm's descriptive phrase – "Something than which a greater cannot be thought" – so that it becomes: "Some *F* than which a greater *F* cannot be thought" where "an *F*" is anything other than God.

This is Anselm's decisive response to Gaunilo and to all his defenders. There is no need to debate whether islands have maximal qualities, or any of the other defences which have been proposed on Anselm's behalf. Anselm himself has explained and justified in *Reply* III why the logic of his argumentation could not apply to anything other than something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and why it is not legitimate to amend that description so that it describes anything other than God. Of course, Anselm understood the logic of his proof. So, of course, he could assert with confidence, and a touch of irony, that:

> *if anyone should discover for me something which either exists in reality or in thought alone in addition to* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, to which he could apply the logic of this argumentation, I shall discover* [that] *lost island and give* [it] *to him, to be lost no more*.

Like the legendary island of Atlantis, Gaunilo's island has been sunk, and is lost forever.

CHAPTER 8

Anselm's Theological Stage Three Argument

The task of the third stage of Anselm's three-stage proof of the existence of God is to identify something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with the God in whom he believes and whom he had been addressing before his prayer was interrupted by his remembering the Fool's denial. As I have explained, he is able to do so because he has now proven that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a property – being unable to be thought not to exist – which is a distinctive property of God.

When he said, before he even began his proof, that "We believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought", that was a belief which he was seeking to understand. In the middle of *Proslogion* III he now reaffirms that belief, in a slightly different formulation, as a proven truth, declaring:

> *And this is You, Lord our God.*

Identifying something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with the God whom he is addressing enables him immediately to conclude that:

> *Therefore, You so truly exist, Lord my God, that You could not be thought not to exist.*

He then asserts two reasons to explain why those two conclusions are true. I have always claimed, and still maintain, that this passage is the third stage of Anselm's proof of the existence of God. For the little sentence "And rightly so" [*et merito*] indicates that the two sentences which follow are the reasons which justify those two conclusions.

I admire the intellectual integrity Anselm displays by presenting *reasons* to justify this identification, rather than simply asserting those two conclusions. So many of those who attempt to prove that God exists argue for the existence of something – a First Cause, or a Supreme Being – and then simply assert "And this we call God" (or words to that effect) as Thomas Aquinas and many others later do. But Anselm not only identifies something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought as God, he does so in a way which *justifies* that identification.

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Anselm does not offer his readers any more than the sentences quoted above. In this chapter I shall present a way in which he could have proven those two conclusions from those two premises and the conclusion of Stage Two.

1 The Two-Argument Interpretation of Anselm's Original Stage Three

In both *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I took the two reasons Anselm offers to be the premises of two distinct and very different arguments.

The first reason seems to be a miniature argument in itself. For it seems that Anselm is inferring that "You are something than which a greater cannot be thought" from the first reason:[1]

> (R1) *If some mind could think of something better than You, a creature would be ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, which is completely absurd.*

Since (R1) presupposes that God is the Creator, both in *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I interpreted it as a 'theological argument', and said that "it would impress an atheist not one whit", commenting, "but then Anselm shows no sign of wanting to impress the atheist; he simply seeks understanding of his own belief".[2]

In my second book I suggested that Anselm included this theological argument in order to assure potential critics that his proof is theologically orthodox. For, as I explained in §1.1, Anselm would have been acutely aware that expressing unorthodox opinions about God could be dangerous, and he had encountered violent resistance to his project within his own monastery. But this reason could play no part in his proof, because it presupposes that God exists and is the Creator. Thus, it would beg the question.

However, that argument seems to be redundant because the first conclusion – that "*You are something than which a greater cannot be thought*" – is also entailed by a premise which can be extracted from his second reason. Anselm introduces this reason by writing:

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1 That is how Gregory Schufreider also interprets what follows from this sentence, *An Introduction to Anselm's Argument*, p. 62. I am labelling the two reasons (R1) and (R2) to facilitate referring to them.

2 Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding*, p. 135, repeated in Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 222.

Et quidem quicquid est aliud praeter te solum, potest cogitari non esse.

As discussed in §2.3, there are significantly different translations of this sentence. I argued there that there strong reasons to support Ian Logan's translation of this sentence, as:

And indeed, whatever is other than You alone can be thought not to exist.[3]

Since the word the word "alone" plays no role in the argument which follows, his premise may be understood as asserting nothing more than:

(R2) *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

Because the subject of (R2) refers to everything *other* than God, in both my books I interpreted this reason as a non-theological premise of what I called Anselm's "metaphysical argument". It was my recognizing that the subject of that premise includes within its reference the whole universe and everything in it which led me to interpret Anselm's proof as a cosmological argument, and not the ontological argument which Anselm's proof is almost universally taken to be. This second reason proves to be very strong, for I was able to show how, construing it as a premise, it entails, together with the conclusion of Stage Two, *both* the conclusions which Anselm announced.

However, it is concerning that Anselm offered no explanation or justification for this premise in the *Proslogion*. But I thought that it was nevertheless acceptable because in *Reply* I Anselm has a long discussion of the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist, and in *Reply* IV argues from a summary of those criteria that "All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme". So it seemed to me that he presents that argument in order to justify that premise, thereby rectifying that omission. I also argued in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* that even if it is supposed that God does not exist, the two conclusions quoted above still follow from that second reason, so this reason is not question-begging. But demonstrating that only served to display just how strong this premise is.

I am now convinced that I erred in reading that *Reply* IV argument back into Stage Three of the *Proslogion*. For, as I shall explain in Chapter 9, Anselm's *Reply* IV argument relies on presuppositions which are not admissible in a justification of his Stage Three argument.

3 Logan *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 34.

2 The Provenance of the Second Reason in Anselm's Original Stage Three

I reported in §2.3 that some commentators object to my interpretation of Stage Three as containing a 'metaphysical' argument with the second reason as its premise. It has been objected that (R2) presupposes that God alone cannot be conceived not to exist, and therefore it begs the question. So, it is not acceptable as a premise. I have already shown in §2.3 that that objection is unsound because (R2) is equivalent to "*If* anything cannot be thought not to exist, it is none other than You", which does not presuppose that there is *anything* which cannot be thought not to exist.

I also reported in §2.3 that Bernd Goebel contacted me after reading my exegesis of Stage Three in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* to share his concern that

> I agree that one COULD interpret the sentence, "And indeed, whatever is other than You alone can be thought not to exist" as a proof of the uniqueness of QM [*quo maius cogitari non potest*]. But its premise is so strong and is not argued for in P3 at all, that it seems quite pointless to put it forward as an argument. You admit yourself that it asserts, rather than justifies, that there is only one thing the non-existence of which cannot be thought. If we call THIS a proof, then many assertions that no one would dream of calling a proof would turn out to be proofs as well.[4]

I agree that this premise is very strong, and now concede that my earlier attempt to interpret it as asserting nothing about God – because its subject is "*Whatever is other than You*" – was misconceived. For (R2) does imply that God is whatever cannot be thought not to exist, if there is any such thing. While (R2) does not *assert* that God cannot be thought not to exist, and therefore, does not beg the question, it suffices to prove, together with the conclusion of Stage Two, that God so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist. So it is indeed very powerful.

Goebel then generously added a suggestion, which he thought not sufficiently plausible to overcome his own objection:

> One could perhaps try to defend its being a proof by saying that its premise "Whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist" is somehow obvious, but then it wasn't obvious to Gaunilo. I understand that Anselm's subsequent use of "*Id quo maius …*" instead of "*Aliquid quo*

4 Personal email, 17-March-2019.

> *maius* …" would make much better sense if we suppose that he does prove the uniqueness of "*Aliquid quo maius* …" in P3 and identifies "*Id quo maius* …" with the Christian God. But the real metaphysical argument and the only one clearly worthy of this name seems to be the one in the *Responsio editoris*.

After a comment about a quite different issue, he added:

> I know that a lot depends on your thesis that P3 supplies the third stage of the argument and brings it to a close. But I think the least you must admit is that it is not obvious that it does so and that, while all those people throughout the ages who failed to see that it does may be blamed, our hero too is somewhat to be blamed for their failure to fully grasp his reasoning.

Provoked by Goebel's intervention I began to wonder *why* Anselm made no attempt to justify this proposition, since, without it, he has no argument for the existence of God. As I was pondering that question, it suddenly occurred to me that the very suggestion Goebel dismisses – that Anselm thought this premise was somehow obvious – is, in fact, the answer. For it suddenly stuck me that:

> *Of course, it was obvious to Anselm that whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist!*

Why? Because every time Anselm attends Mass, he joins his brothers in reciting the Nicene Creed, the first clause of which says:

> We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

That clause *entails* this controversial premise! So, it seems that *both* the reasons Anselm provides in Stage Three are theological propositions.

Of course, that God is the Creator of all other things is a basic belief which he would have come across time and again in his reading and listening. It pervades Christian thought so thoroughly that Anselm would have seen no need to mention any particular source. However, for the purpose of reconstructing his Stage Three argument, I choose the first clause of the Nicene Creed as it is an authoritative statement with which he would have been very familiar.

Identifying the source of (R2) caused me immediately to perceive it in a quite different *gestalt*. Once I recognized how straightforwardly that premise is entailed by the first clause in the Nicene Creed, I immediately accepted

that for forty-five years I have been wrong to interpret this proposition as the premise of a second, metaphysical argument, independent of his first, theological argument.

In retrospect, it should not have been a surprise that Anselm bases this argument on his theological beliefs. After all, how could he establish that God exists in any other way than by invoking some theologically-based premise? But my mind was closed to that possibility because I always presumed that to invoke God as the Creator would be begging the question of God's existence. That preunderstanding caused me to underestimate Anselm's ingenuity.

I shall demonstrate in §8.4 how Anselm's controversial premise is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene creed. That is enough to explain why Anselm thought it to be so obvious that he saw no need to justify it, nor even to mention that creed as its source.

3 The Role of the First Reason in Anselm's Original Stage Three Argument

Discerning that (R2) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed made me see his first reason in a different light. For if both reasons are theological in character, what is Anselm trying to accomplish by writing the sentence (R1)? To recall, his first reason is:

> (R1) *If some mind could think of something better than You, a creature would be ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, which is completely absurd.*

It seemed reasonable to interpret (R1) as a self-contained theological argument because Anselm has already declared that the God he is addressing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. So, interpreting (R1) that way, it follows from the absurdity of thinking that a creature could ascend about the Creator, and pass judgement on the Creator asserted in (R1) that:

> (1) It is not possible that some mind can think of something better than You.

That claim echoes the many descriptions of God which were reported in §3.1 and §3.2, especially those made by Augustine.

Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to construe that sentence as a simple argument designed to deduce that:

(2) You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Many commentators have puzzled over the fact that Anselm has written the word "*melius*" [better] in (R1), whereas the description he always uses elsewhere contains the word "*maius*" [greater]. But that puzzle is easily solved. I proposed in §3.3 that "greater than" be defined in a way which takes into account Anselm's explanation in *Reply* VIII. To recall, he proposes there that the way to infer the concept of something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought is to think of goods which are 'better' than other goods, and then goods which are even better than those, until one finds that it is not possible to think of anything better. Accordingly I defined the relation of "greater than" as:

(3) Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x*, and some positive, primitive, predicate *F*, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y*.

Since (1) says that all the conditions prescribed in (3) are met, (2) follows validly from (1) and (3) by the rule of Hypothetical Syllogism. Invoking Conditional Proof to express that implication, it follows that:

(4) If it is not possible that some mind could think of something better than You, then You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

In both *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I interpreted (R1) as a 'theological argument' designed to establish (2).[5] But if Anselm intended that (2) be inferred from his negative comment "which is completely absurd", it is strange that he did not assert (1), since (1) implies (2), given Anselm's explanation of "greater than". I had read (2) into the text as implied by the absurdity of the consequent in (R1), but I now acknowledge that Anselm does not explicitly assert that (2) follows from (R1). Although that inference is formally valid, I now retract my previous interpretation because I no longer think that deducing (2) was Anselm's purpose in writing this sentence.

For, as I was thinking my way through these issues, I took seriously Bernd Goebel's comment that he was somewhat hesitant to concede that what I had

5 Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding*, pp.133–136 and *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, pp. 220–27.

called the 'theological argument' is part of the main body of the proof. So, I began to wonder whether Anselm had written this sentence for a different purpose. Since it is a *belief* that God is the Creator, the conclusion that God is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be anything more than a belief. Yet it seems that Anselm takes himself to have *proven* that God alone is something than which a greater cannot be thought and therefore that He exists as truly as it does.

Those musings led me focus on the question of whether the absurdity of a creature ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, is a strong enough reason to infer that God is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. It is not that I disagree that it is absurd for creatures to presume that they can pass judgement on their own Creator. But the more I thought about it, the closer I came to recognizing the main problem with this theological argument is that the absurdity Anselm asserts is *not probative*. As David Smith says, Anselm's assertion is "a profession of belief, and hardly an argument. … the absurdity in question is a religious absurdity".[6]

Ian Logan comments on this sentence:

> The absurdity of the idea of the creature judge its creator lies in the gulf that man cannot bridge, given his limitedness and God's unlimitedness.[7]

I would not have expressed this reason quite that way, but Logan is right to point to their being a gulf between the contingent mode of being of everything in the universe and God's unlimited mode of being. So it would not be unreasonable for Anselm to maintain, on theological grounds, that for a creature to ascend above the Creator, and pass judgement on the Creator, is not *fitting*.[8] In his later theological writings, such as the *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm often appeals to what is 'fitting' to advance his arguments, and it is reasonable to do so in a theological context.

But that it is not 'fitting' to assert something does not entail that what is asserted is *impossible*. Since the question of the very existence of God hangs on *proving* that God is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, what is merely *fitting* is not nearly strong enough. Establishing that identity requires a reason which implies that it is *impossible* for any mind to think of something better than God, without presupposing that God exists and is the Creator.

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6 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 13.

7 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 96.

8 Gregory Schufreider makes a similar comment in *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, where he translates the phrase "*Et merito*" which Anselm writes to introduce his two reasons as "And it is fitting", p. 169 and p. 327.

Now, (R1) is about what some mind could think. The difficulty that the absurdity which Anselm alleges in (R1) is not fitting, rather than a logical impossibility, would not be a difficulty if he were inferring a somewhat softer conclusion than (2) from (R1). As I reported in §8.1, I had always been aware that deducing (2) from (R1) would be redundant, and would be acceptable only to those who were already believers in God. Since (R1) presupposes that God is the Creator, deducing (2) could not play any role in proving that God exists, since it would beg the very question of His existence. All those considerations point to one finding: Anselm did *not* write this sentence with a view to deducing (2) from his assertion of that absurdity. But that finding returns us to the question we asked at the beginning of this section: What is Anselm trying to accomplish by writing (R1)?

Having discerned in §8.2 that it can be shown that (R2) is entailed by the Nicene Creed, I have now discerned two other, and quite different, reasons which would explain why Anselm has written (R1). I surmise that one of his purposes is to make his readers aware that the ultimate reason why his second premise is true, and therefore why his conclusions are true, is his belief that God is the Creator of all other things. That is, I submit that one of the roles of (R1) is to explain the provenance of (R2); Anselm is pointing out to his readers that the belief in the Creator is the *source* of his second reason.

To my knowledge, only one commentator, Arthur McGill, has clearly discerned that Anselm is arguing in Stage Three that his conclusions are derived from his belief that the God whom he is addressing is the Creator of all other things. McGill explains Anselm's introduction of this second reason by writing:

> The human mind can conceive of any created reality as not existing because (as Anselm explains more fully in his *Reply* to Gaunilo) such a thing does not have a full unlimited existence.[9]

When I first read the *Proslogion* fifty years ago I immediately recognized in Anselm's text the three-stage structure I have advocated ever since. But I now ruefully confess that I too have been operating with a preunderstanding which obscured what seems so patently clear in the text now that I have set aside that preunderstanding. For I uncritically assumed that no valid argument for the existence of God could be constructed from a premise which presupposed that God exists. I shall show in §8.6 that that assumption is simply wrong.

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9 McGill, 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument', p. 40, but it does not appear that he recognizes that Anselm's premise is actually entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed.

While it is easy enough to infer (2) from (1) by invoking the definition of "greater than", I have also come to see that (R1) serves a more subtle and more significant function. For a proposition may be deduced from (R1) which, together with (R2) and the conclusion of Stage Two, entail his two conclusions without begging the question.

Anselm writes (R1) because he is presupposing that the God whom he is addressing the Creator of all other things. His invoking his belief in the Creator, a belief he shares with the whole of Christendom, is appropriate at this juncture since he has recognized that that belief entails that only the Creator could not be thought not to exist. But before he introduces that as a premise he prepares the ground by writing (R1). To articulate that presupposition explicitly, Anselm is assuming that the following is a logical truth:

(5) If You are the Creator of all other things, then it is not possible that some mind could think of something better than You.

(5) is a logical truth because all it asserts is the validity of that implication. It neither asserts nor presupposes that God is the Creator of all other things.

It is not difficult to see why that implication is sound. The ascent in thought which Anselm describes in *Reply* VIII is from things which are good to things which are better, and then to something which is even better than them. We saw in §2.5 that Anselm evaluates existing as better than not existing. So, if all things other than the God whom Anselm is addressing have been created by Him, there could not be anything better than Him. It follows from that, by his principle (3:14), that since it is impossible that something is better than the Creator of all other things, no mind could think of something better than the Creator. That is why it is absurd for a creature to try to pass judgment on its own Creator.

It follows from (4) and (5), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(6) If You are the Creator of all other things, then You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Since (R1) is about what some mind could think, it is appropriate to apply Anselm's Conceivability rule to (6). Doing so yields:

(7) If it can be thought that You are the Creator of all other things, it can be thought that You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Because both (4) and (5) are logical implications, so are (6) and (7). Since (7) is an implication about what can be thought, it does not beg the questions of whether God exists nor whether God is the Creator of all other things.

I have inferred (7) from (1) because I take the point which Anselm is making by writing (R1) is that:

(8) To think of God as the Creator of all things is to think of something than which a greater could not be thought.

Anselm understands that (8) is true because he has recognized that only the Creator could not be thought not to exist. That is, implicit in (R1) is the following claim:

(9) It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that You are the Creator of all other things.

That claim is implicit in (R1) because (1) is logically equivalent to "It is necessary that every mind is able to think that there is nothing better than You".

I submit that Anselm asserts (R1) in order to establish those two propositions, (7) and (9). (9) will play a crucial role in the deduction of his two conclusions in §8.6, for it implies the consequent of (7). Since both those propositions are about what can be thought, it is no longer a cause for concern that the absurdity which from which it has been deduced is not impossible, but merely 'not fitting'.

Inevitably, any interpretation of what Anselm intended when he wrote (R1) is somewhat speculative. But if my analysis of the roles of this first reason is anywhere near right, Anselm intended it to serve two purposes. One purpose is to alert his readers to the fact that the ultimate reason why his second premise is true, and therefore why his conclusions are true, is the belief of all Christians that God is the Creator of all other things. The other purpose is to establish that that belief can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when that thing itself is understood, and because that can be thought, the God who is described in the Nicene Creed is something than which a greater cannot be thought. Because (9) neither asserts nor presupposes that God is the Creator of all other things, it may serve as a premise in Anselm's proof without begging the question.

The claims made by (7) and (9) are not as strong as the claim made by (2). But establishing those two has prepared the ground for him to argue that that thought is true. For it follows from (8) and (9) that:

(10) It can be thought that You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

That consequence sets the agenda for the second reason, which entails the two conclusions he has announced. For in the text of Stage Three Anselm explicitly refers to "You" as the Creator in (R1), and connects this second reason, (R2) to the first, (R1) by writing "And indeed". The second premise which Anselm introduces – "*Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist*" – suffices, together with the conclusion of Stage Two, to prove on far stronger grounds than what is 'fitting' that the thought in (10) – that is, (2) – is true, and consequently, that God exists. I therefore submit that one of the roles of (R1) is to signal that (R2) also presupposes the belief that God is the Creator.

This is not the only place where Anselm argues that "[something] can be thought" as the condition of an argument he is presenting. As was shown in Chapter 5, in the three arguments which he presents in *Reply* 1 as alternative ways of establishing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought cannot not exist, he was careful to qualify each of those conclusions with the condition, "If it can be thought". Likewise here, I submit, he is being scrupulously careful to establish that "It can be thought that You are something than which a greater cannot be thought" before he introduces (R2) as a premise, because that premise entails that that thought is true.

That the role of (R1) is to establish that "It can be thought that You are something than which a greater cannot be thought" shows that this first reason is far from redundant. And since it is implied by "It can be thought that You are the Creator of all other things", Anselm has established a premise which will be required if he is validly to prove the two conclusions he has declared, without begging the question of God's existence. My belatedly recognizing that that is the role of (R1) reinforces my ever-growing respect for Anselm's intellectual integrity, the keenness of his grasp of logical propriety, and the sensitivity with which he explores his faith.

4 Deriving the Second Reason in Anselm's Original Stage Three Argument

I have said that the first clause of the Nicene Creed entails Anselm's second reason (R2). That can be demonstrated as follows:

Like the whole of Christendom, Anselm believes that:

(11) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible.

Anselm does not assert the proposition (11) as a premise, despite its being the ultimate premise of this argument. It is, of course, a belief, but its status is different from the belief which Anselm expresses in *Proslogion* 11:

(B) *And indeed we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

Anselm wrote that sentence immediately after beseeching God to help him understand what he believes. As I have emphasized, when he uttered that sentence, he does not know whether that belief is true, and it has been rendered problematic by the Fool's denial. Indeed, one of the objectives of Stage Three is to come to understand why that belief is true.

On the other hand, while the various propositions asserted in the Nicene Creed are all beliefs, they have been approved by the Councils of the whole Church, and are recited as part of the Mass.[10] So while Anselm has yet to prove that the God described by that Creed exists, he not only understands the meaning of the words in that creed, but he also understands that that is what all Christians believe God to be.

The meaning of the first clause of the Nicene Creed is clear, but a pedant could object that it implies that God is the maker of Himself! After all, the phrase "all things visible and invisible" refers to absolutely *everything* – including God. Nevertheless, it would be absurd to suggest that the Council of Nicaea was intending to imply that God also made Himself. I only mention this point because if Anselm's premise is to be validly deduced from this credal statement, it is necessary that it be stated explicitly that what God is the maker

10 The phrase "of heaven and earth" was not part of the creed originally agreed by the Council of Nicaea in 325. It was added by the Council of Constantinople in 381, no doubt to ensure that this clause had a Biblical basis in *Genesis* 1:1.

of is everything *other than* Himself. The following mutual entailment clarifies and simplifies the claim made by (11):

(12) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

That is a conceptual truth. It follows from (11) and (12), by *modus ponens*, that:

(13) God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

(13) is equivalent to:

(14) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, has been created by Him.

Anselm began the *Monologion* by introducing the concepts of existing *per aliud* and existing *per se* as his starting point. He describes there those things which depend upon something else for their very existence as existing through another [*existens per aliud*]. The opposite of existing *per aliud* is existing through itself [*existens per se*], that is, having such a nature as to be unable not to exist. It is highly likely that Anselm would have understood the implications of (11) in those terms. So, Anselm would probably have inferred from (14) that whatever exists and is other than God exists '*per aliud*'.

However, this step can be expressed in more ordinary language. Since it is a conceptual truth that whatever has been *made* only exists because it has been made – it is not possible for anything to make itself exist – it is a conceptual truth that

(15) Whatever exists as a result of being created does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of any intrinsic necessity.

The clause, "does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of any intrinsic necessity" is my way of expressing what Anselm would say: "does not exist *per se*".

Now, it is a logical truth that:

(16) Whatever does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of any intrinsic necessity is able not to exist.

That is a logical truth because "It is necessary that *p*" is logically equivalent to "It is not possible that not-*p*", and, for Anselm, what possibly exists is able to exist, and what possibly does not exist is able not to exist, as we saw in §3.6. As David Smith has pointed out, while the grammar of "is unable not to exist" [*non potest non esse*] makes it appear to be a disability, Anselm regards that as a true, but improper, way of speaking.[11] As noted in §3.6, what that expression really means is that whatever is unable not to exist exists with such power [*potestas*] that nothing could ever prevent it from existing or cause it not to exist.

It follows from (15) and (16), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(17) Whatever exists as a result of being created is able not to exist.

So, it now follows from (14) and (17), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(18) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, is able not to exist.

From (18), it follows, by Anselm's Conceivability rule, that:

(19) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, can be thought not to exist.

The derivation of Anselm's Stage Three premise can be completed by citing Anselm's Conceivability Principle:

(20) If *p*, it can be thought that *p*.

Substituting for "whatever does not exist" for "*p*" in (20), yields:

(21) Whatever does not exist can be thought not to exist.

Conjoining the referent of (18) with the referent of (21) yields a subject which refers to "Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty", irrespective of whatever exists or does not exist. So, it follows from conjoining (19) and (21) that:

11 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 74.

(22) Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

In *Proslogion* III, having proven the conclusion of Stage Two, Anselm resumes his prayer, addressing each step of his reasoning to God. But (22) is not exactly the same as (R2). Anselm replaces the subject term in (22) – "God the Father Almighty" – with the pronoun, "You". That yields:

(23) *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

Since it has been demonstrated that (23) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed it no longer appears to be a proposition which Anselm simply invented in order to deduce his conclusions from it. While some commentators might baulk at calling that entailment a 'justification', the fact that his premise is so entailed means that no longer does it appear inexplicably out of the blue.

I acknowledge that it could be objected that there is no reference in the text to the Nicene Creed, and that my surmise is somewhat speculative. But if my surmise is right and Anselm has derived that premise from that creed, it is not surprising that he does not say so. He would have thought that (22) is obvious. Moreover, in both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* Anselm is deliberately not appealing to authority – not to the Bible, nor to official statements of doctrine – but to what can be rationally deduced from his beliefs.

We should not be surprised that Anselm appears to have derived both his premises from his belief that God is the Creator. For he finished his long prayer in *Proslogion* I by making it clear that:

> *I do not seek to understand, so that I might believe, but I believe so that I might understand. For this I also believe: that unless I believe, I shall not understand.*

Should someone object to this interpretation of Stage Three on the grounds that Anselm did not refer explicitly to the Nicene Creed, I reply: If Anselm did not derive his premise from his belief that God is the Creator of all other things, his premise would have no provenance at all, but yet it is strong enough to entail nothing less than the existence of God. In that case, it would be an extraordinary coincidence that nevertheless it is entailed by that creed. That entailment is a logical fact, and if my surmise is rejected, his premise remains totally unjustified and too strong to be acceptable. In that case, he would have no proof of the existence of God at all.

In the middle of *Proslogion* III Anselm resumes his prayer, and begins again addressing God as "You" because, having deduced the conclusion of Stage Two, he has established as the conclusion of Stage Two that:

> *Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.*

That same conclusion was proven on line (41) in Chapter 6 where Stage Two of the cosmological reformulation of his proof was articulated. That is what he needs in order to declare that:

> *This is You, Lord our God.*

The brevity of this exclamation amplifies its force. Anselm's reasoning has arrived at a truth the significance of which the eye of his soul has seen in a moment of revelation. In a flash, his understanding has achieved the insight which he had been hoping to attain. For he *recognizes* that 'this' is none other than the God to whom he had to cease praying while he was thinking his way through to an answer to the question: "Is there not *anything* of such a nature?" Since that Stage Two conclusion is all he needs to identify that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought with the God to whom he had been addressing his prayer before he remembered the Fool's denial, he is in a position to resume addressing the God whom he has just recognized by again using the pronoun, "You".

Of course, recognizing in the middle of *Proslogion* III that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is the God to whom he had been addressing his prayer does not mean that it is only now that has he realized that the God whom he has been addressing is the Creator of all other things. He has been addressing the same God as "You" right from the beginning of *Proslogion* I up to the moment when he remembers the Fool's denial. What changes throughout the *Proslogion* is not the *identity* of God, but Anselm's *understanding* of His identity.

The fact that in (23) Anselm addresses the subject of (22) as "You" suffices to establish that:

> (24) The God whom Anselm is addressing as "You, Lord our God" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

That seems to me to be undeniable. Yet several commentators insist that Anselm requires the whole of the *Proslogion* to justify his identification of

the God whom he is addressing as the God in whom all Christians believe.[12] That indeed was the argumentative strategy which Anselm adopted in the *Monologion*, where he identifies the Supreme Being whom he has been discussing for 79 chapters as the God whom Christians worship only in the final Chapter 80. But the *Monologion* is written entirely in objective third-person prose. Since Anselm tells his readers in the Preface of the *Proslogion* that he became dissatisfied with the strategy he had enacted in the *Monologion*, it would be a mistake to read the same strategy into the *Proslogion*. That it is here, in the second half of *Proslogion* III, that Anselm identifies something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought with the God in whom he and all Christians believe will be defended in Chapter 11.

I submit that it is highly significant that apart from the passages where he articulates Stages One and Two of his proof, and most of *Proslogion* IV, where he reflects upon what he has just proven, almost all the rest of the *Proslogion* is written in first-to-second person discourse. That is one of its unifying features. It is manifest that his use of the pronoun "You" and his proving that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a property which is a distinctive property of God has enabled him to make the identification of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with the God whom he is addressing in *Proslogion* III.

Now that I have demonstrated that Anselm's second reason (R2) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, the argument which follows from that reason now appears also to be a *theological* argument with (23) as its premise. Since both Anselm's reasons, (R1) and (R2), are theological in nature, there is no basis for considering those two reasons as premises of two distinct arguments. Accordingly, I am withdrawing my previous two-argument exegesis and am about to present a new, and radically different, interpretation of Anselm's original Stage Three.

5 Showing That Stage Three Is Where Anselm Proves That God Exists

I expect that sceptical readers will object to my interpreting the second half of *Proslogion* III as the passage in which Anselm proves that God exists, on two grounds. Those objections must be addressed before proceeding any further.

The first ground of objection is that, as we have seen, Anselm resumes the language of prayer halfway through *Proslogion* III, always addressing God thereafter as "You". Second-person discourse presupposes the existence of its

12 For instance, Richard la Croix, *Proslogion II and III*; Jasper Hopkins, 'On Understanding and Preunderstanding St. Anselm'; and Ian Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*.

audience. So, if this passage is supposed to be his proof of the existence of God, by using that pronoun Anselm is already presupposing what he is setting out to prove. To construe an argument which presupposes what it is supposed to prove is to beg the question outrageously.

This objection is, however, easily rebutted. It has been shown in §8.4 how Anselm's second reason, (R2), is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed. The derivation of (22) – that "Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist" – from the first clause of that creed proceeded in the objective style of third-person discourse. It was shown on line (24) how Anselm uses the pronoun "You" to refer to that God. While Anselm expresses Stage Three of his proof using that pronoun, the validity of the deduction is not affected by that use. That deduction would have just as valid if he had presented it by referring to its subject as "God the Father Almighty". Indeed, in Chapter 10, where I shall be revisiting this argument, I shall present it using that referring phrase instead of Anselm's pronoun. So any sceptic who is disconcerted by my replicating Anselm's use of the pronoun "You" may easily mentally substitute "God the Father Almighty" for that pronoun without affecting the validity of those inferences.

Nevertheless, to insist that Anselm should not have used the pronoun "You" in presenting Stage Three of his proof is to obliterate one of its distinctive features. I have emphasized from the outset that Anselm recognizes that his very existence as a monk has been called into question by the Fool's denial. He is not trying to produce an impersonal proof; his future is at stake as he engages with the issue of determining whether the Fool is right. In *Proslogion* II and III Anselm is seeking to *understand* what he initially merely believed: that the God to whom he has been praying is something than which nothing greater could be thought. His use of first-to-second person discourse expresses that engagement. Having demonstrated that something of that nature not only exists in reality, but also has a property which he believes to be distinctive of God, he is entitled to resume his address to God as he demonstrates why his conclusions are sound.

The second ground on which a sceptic is likely to object to my interpreting the second half of *Proslogion* III as where he proves the existence of God is that it is evident that Anselm is basing his proof upon his *belief* in God as the Creator. So, he is begging the question in a second way. Certainly, if Anselm is deducing his two conclusions directly from the conclusion of Stage Two and (23), those conclusions would also be beliefs. So, if that is how his Stage Three argument goes, it can reasonably be objected that Anselm has not *proven* that God exists, for not only is (23) a belief, but it is entailed by (11), the first clause

of the Nicene Creed, which presupposes that God exists. Indeed, that creed begins with the words "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty …".

Does it matter that Anselm has not *proven* that God exists if his proof infers his conclusions directly from the conclusion of Stage Two and (23)? A number of interpreters of Anselm's *Proslogion* think that that does not matter, because they deny that Anselm ever *intended* to prove the existence of God. An early exponent of this view in modern times was Anselm Stolz, who in 1933 insisted that

> Anselm writes the *Proslogion* as a believing Christian. Nothing is more absurd than to see a philosopher in the author of the *Proslogion*.... Anselm stands wholly on the foundation of his Christian faith. That is why toward the end of the *Proslogion*, without any transition, he can introduce the dogma of God's tri-personality.... For Anselm the dogmas are not subject to discussion; his faith presumes them.[13]

Stolz acknowledges that

> *Proslogion* II–IV contains a two-fold proof. The first is that God truly is, for He is just as faith teaches us; the other is that God really is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived".[14]

He denies that "*vere esse*" means "real existence" in the sense that other things 'outside God' have real existence, insisting that "There is no trace of a proof of God's existence".

David Smith has carefully investigated all the passages relevant to the question of whether Anselm presents a proof of the existence of God in the *Proslogion* and concludes that

> if the identification of God with *G* [= something than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] were straightforward, it would be plausible to suppose that Anselm did indeed set out to prove the existence of God in a way that would be acceptable to any rational person.[15]

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13 Anselm Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology in the *Proslogion*', tr. Arthur C. McGill, in Hick & McGill, ed., *The Many-Faced Argument*, pp. 183–209, at p. 188.

14 Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology in the *Proslogion*', p. 197.

15 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 12.

In the course of that investigation, Smith examined how Anselm uses the expression "*vere esse*", and has concluded that

> All this evidence points overwhelmingly to a conclusion that is the very opposite of Stolz's. Anselm never uses "truly exists" to express specifically eternal existence. When he does use it, it merely expresses actual existence.[16]

We saw in §1.1 how Anselm described in the Preface of the *Proslogion* how he began to ask himself if a single reason [*unum argumentum*] could be discovered which would, amongst other objectives, "need no other … for demonstrating [*ad astruendum*] that God truly exists". That shows, beyond question, that Anselm intended to prove that God exists. I shall cite below four other passages which support the same interpretation.

I concede that Stolz has perceived one significant fact. Anselm never writes "*deus est in re*" [God is in reality]. It is not difficult to understand why. "*Est in re*" is a binary predicate. So, to say that God is in reality would ascribe to God the same predicate as is true of everything He has created. Stolz is right to insist that Anselm would never assert that, even though it follows logically. I am sure that Anselm would say that such an ascription is not "fitting". But Anselm's vocabulary also includes the verb "*esse*" [being] which allows there to be degrees of existing which are more or less intense. Accordingly, Anselm no longer uses the verbal phrase "is in reality" in *Proslogion* III. He ends *Proslogion* II by introducing a verb which occurs nowhere else in the proof and concludes that

> *There exists* [existit]*, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought both in the understanding and in reality*.

That verb "*existit*" marks the transition from "*est in re*" to his use of "*est*" without qualification in *Proslogion* III.

Toivo Holopainen has also challenged the view that there is something in *Proslogion* II or *Proslogion* II–III that can be called "Anselm's argument". In the Introduction to his recent book, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, he reports:

> … the train of reasoning in *Proslogion* 2 does not start from having the concept of God but from the uttering of the expression "that than which a greater cannot be thought". Anselm's inference moves from an expression being uttered and heard to a thing existing in the understanding and in

16 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 10.

> reality, there being no equivalent to the notion 'concept' in *Proslogion* 2. Moreover, the inference in *Proslogion* 2 does not end with the affirmation that God exists.[17]

Holopainen is rare amongst commentators in reporting correctly that Anselm does not start from having 'the concept of God', but from uttering an expression, and that the argument in *Proslogion* II is not about God.[18] Having observed that *Proslogion* III continues from where *Proslogion* II ended, he also correctly points out that it is only in the middle of *Proslogion* III that there comes a conclusion about God. But he then says:

> the conclusion is not about the fact of his existence but about the manner of his existence: he exists so truly that he cannot be thought not to exist. Hence, *Proslogion* 2 and the early part of *Proslogion* 3 constitute one continuous train of reasoning to establish a conclusion about the manner of God's existence.[19]

Later in the book, Holopainen elaborates that interpretation, commenting:

> In the middle of *Proslogion* 3, when Anselm identifies that than which a greater cannot be thought as God, this is a matter of course. Anselm next proceeds to present some remarks about the appropriateness of the conclusion reached. In a way, these remarks also serve to show the appropriateness of the identification of God with that than which a greater cannot be thought.[20]

He then quotes the passage of text beginning "And rightly so" and comments:

> It would nevertheless be exaggerated to see these remarks as a 'proof' for the identity of God and that than which a greater cannot be thought.[21]

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17 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion: Argument, Devotion and Rhetoric*, p. 3.

18 Holopainen is correct in reporting that Anselm does not start from having 'the concept of God', but from uttering an expression. But, to make a pedantic point, the expression with which Anselm begins is not "*that* than which *a greater cannot* be thought"; it is "*something* than which *nothing greater could* be thought".

19 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 3–4.

20 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 44.

21 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 44. It is unsurprising that he refers to Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology in the *Proslogion*' in relation to this, since Stolz denies that Anselm ever intended to prove the existence of God. But it is surprising that he also refers to McGill, 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument', and Campbell, *From Belief*

It seems that it is because Holopainen interprets Anselm's reasons as presenting "some remarks about the appropriateness of the conclusion reached" that he says those "remarks" do not constitute a 'proof'. He is insisting that the second conclusion which Anselm asserts in the middle of *Proslogion* III is not about the *fact* of God's existence, but only about the *manner* of His existence because "some remarks about the appropriateness of the conclusions reached" are not strong enough to constitute a 'proof'.

I strongly disagree with that trivializing characterization of the two reasons Anselm presents in the second half of *Proslogion* III to justify his conclusions. In the Preface Anselm had prescribed six objectives which the '*unum argumentum*' he hoped to discover would fulfil. The second of those objective is to demonstrate "that God truly exists". I find Holopainen's comments on how Anselm fulfils that objective very puzzling. Holopainen writes:

> In the introduction to this study, it was observed that Anselm fails to draw the conclusion that God exists at the end of *Proslogion* 2. In spite of this, it is clear that Anselm intended this conclusion to be understood. In Anselm's view, God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, and therefore proving that that than which a greater cannot be thought exists in reality is proving that God exists in reality.[22]

And in a later footnote Holopainen comments that

> The inference in *Proslogion* 2–3 seeks to establish both the fact and the manner of God's existence, but Anselm fails to draw a conclusion about the fact of God's existence at the end of *Proslogion* 2.[23]

That skates over the critical questions of how and where Anselm establishes that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, and consequently that God truly exists. To describe the fact that the conclusion of *Proslogion* II does not mention God as a 'failure' on Anselm's part is completely to misunderstand the argumentative strategy which Anselm deploys across *Proslogion* II and III. The suggestion that Anselm *intended* his Stage One conclusion to apply to God, but 'failed' to say so, is quite misconceived. As I argued in §1.5, it would be irredeemably fallacious to claim that the conclusion of *Proslogion* II proves

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to Understanding. I certainly argued in *From Belief to Understanding* that the second of Anselm's reasons entails that God exists (pp. 147–48).

22 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 17.

23 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 31.

that God exists. And Anselm does not have any grounds for declaring "This is You, Lord our God" until after he has drawn the conclusion of Stage Two in the middle of *Proslogion* III.

Holopainen explains this alleged 'failure' as due to Anselm's wanting "to push his argument one step further in the first half of *Proslogion* 3", but only observes that

> The argument assumes that that than which a greater cannot be thought exists (as demonstrated in *Proslogion* 2), and strives to establish that it exists 'so truly that it cannot even be thought not to exist'.

That exposition seems to suggest that Anselm simply *assumes* that God exists, but never even tries to justify that assumption. Given the dialectical setting of *Proslogion* II and III is that Anselm is engaging with the Fool's denial, I find that interpretation literally incredible. Not only that, but it also contradicts the second criterion which Anselm stipulated in the Preface, that his *unum argumentum* he hoped to discover would demonstrate "that God truly exists".

Despite those comments, Holopainen seems to concede that Anselm does conclude somewhere that God exists, for he then observes that "In the middle of *Proslogion* 3, Anselm again identifies that than which a greater cannot be thought as God" and comments that

> Here, the conclusion of the three-stage argument in *Proslogion* 2–3 is applied to God. The conclusion is about the manner of God's existence, but the fact of his existence is proved as well: God not only exists but exists in such a manner that he cannot even be thought not to exist.[24]

That poses the question: How could Anselm have proven the fact of God's existence if the reasons he presents as justifying those two conclusions can be dismissed as merely "some remarks about the appropriateness of the conclusions reached"?

The decisive reason why the interpretations of both Stolz and Holopainen are untenable is that Anselm deduces that "Therefore, You so truly exist [*Sic ergo vere es*], Lord my God, that You could not be thought not to exist" from having proven the conclusion of Stage Two:

> *Therefore, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought* so truly exists [sic vere est] *that it could not be thought not to exist*.

24 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 18.

As I demonstrated in §6.2, Anselm is able to establish that conclusion in Stage Two because he has derived the premise of Stage Two from having proven in Stage One that it is *necessary* that this same thing "exists, both in the understanding and in reality". Then, in §6.4 that conclusion was inferred on line (41) in §6.4 from the following which had been validly deduced:

(6:40) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, and *because* it is necessarily true that it is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.

That demonstrates how the qualification "so truly exists", which describes the *manner* of the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is derived his having deduced that it could not be thought not to exist from its being a necessary truth that it exists. Anselm then validly deduces that that same predicate is true of the God whom he is addressing.

There is no doubt that the fact of God's existence and the manner of His existence are two different issues. Anselm first distinguishes the *fact* of existing from the *manner* of existing in Stage Two where he infers from the proven *fact* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in reality that it so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist. As I emphasized in §6.1, it is of the utmost importance that Anselm could not have inferred any conclusion about the manner of its existence if he had not already established that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in reality.

Nor can there be any doubt that Anselm's conclusion in Stage Three – that "You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist" – is explicitly about the *manner* of God's existence. But that does not show that Anselm is not intent upon *demonstrating* that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, and therefore that He exists, as he said in the Preface that he would. That is, Anselm is able to assert his second conclusion because he has identified God with something which could not be thought not to exist. God could not exist in that manner unless He exists. That follows inexorably from the logic of Anselm's proof.

Those interpretations which deny that Anselm is intent on presenting a proof of the existence of God in *Proslogion* II and III, are certainly right to emphasize the spiritual nature of Anselm's quest, and insist that he writes the *Proslogion* as a Christian believer. But his extended prayer in *Proslogion* I shows that the depth of his piety is matched by the depth of the anguish he expresses in saying, "I have never seen You, Lord my God, I have not known Your face". The proof he presents in *Proslogion* II and III is motivated by that anguish as much as by his being disconcerted by his remembering the Fool's denial.

Although Anselm never shows any sign of renouncing his faith, he is deeply troubled by the fact that he does not understand what he believes. That is why he takes the Fool's denial so seriously. If only God would illuminate his mind so that he could come to understand that God *does* exist, he can build on that solid foundation whatever else 'we believe' about God! It is the depth of his faith which drives him to seek a proof of the existence of God. Since he has found such a proof, he completes this first task of his quest by uttering a prayer of thanksgiving:

> *I give thanks to You, good Lord, I give thanks to You, because what I first believed by your gift, I now understand by Your illumination in such a way that even if I should not want to believe it, I would not be able not to understand that You exist.*

There are three other passages which also indicate that Anselm believes that he has *proven* that God exists in a way which is not *dependent* upon his beliefs, despite the fact that he has *derived* that conclusion from his beliefs. Having presented the two reasons which explain why something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is "You, Lord our God" and that "*Therefore, You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist*" Anselm draws a third conclusion:

> Therefore, *You alone have being most truly of all* [verissime omnium], *and for that reason most greatly of all* [maxime omnium], *because whatever is other* [*than You*] *does not exist so truly, and for this reason has less being.*

He then immediately asks:

> *Why then has the Fool said in his heart, "There is not a god", when it is so obvious to a rational mind that You exist most greatly of all? Why, unless he is stupid and a fool.*

That cannot be read in any other way than that Anselm takes himself to have *proven* that God exists most greatly of all so effectively that that conclusion is obvious to *any rational mind*, not only to those who already believe in God.

And in *Proslogion* IV, where Anselm reverts again to third-person discourse, he reiterates his conclusions in a quite objective manner. Having distinguished between the way in which something is thought of by thinking the words which signify it, and the way of thinking in which the thing itself is understood, he says:

> *Accordingly, God can be thought not to exist in the first way, but not at all in the second.*

He immediately follows that by writing:

> *Indeed, no one who understands that thing which God is* [id quod deus est] *can think that God does not exist, although he may say these words in* [his] *heart, be it without any, or with some extraneous, signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Whoever properly understands this, understands that at least this same thing exists so truly that not even in thought can it not exist. Therefore, whoever understands that God exists in the same way cannot think that He does not exist.*

He follows that with his prayer of thanksgiving. In those three passages Anselm is providing his own interpretation of what he has shown in *Proslogion* II and III. They show that his deduction of God's existence is not just a belief he has deduced from other beliefs, but a consequence which has been proven so unequivocally that he is no longer able not to understand that God exists, even if he did not want to believe it.

A fourth passage relevant to this issue are some concluding remarks Anselm writes in *Reply* X upon which Holopainen places considerable significance. Anselm writes in *Reply* X that:

> *I think that I have demonstrated in the aforementioned little book, not by unsound but by necessary argumentation, that there exists in actual reality something than which nothing greater could be thought, and that* [this argumentation] *has not been undermined by any sound objection. For the signification of this utterance holds within itself such force that what is said, on account of the thing itself which is understood or thought, by necessity is really proven to exist and to be that thing itself which is whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance.*[25]

This passage will be discussed in Chapter 11, but what is relevant here is that in the last sentence Anselm is plainly maintaining that "that thing itself" – that is, that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – is "*really proven to exist and to be that thing itself*" which is believed to be God.

Now, it was shown in §8.4 that the first clause of the Nicene Creed entails:

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25 There are significantly different translations of his passage, which I shall discuss in Chapter 11. This is my slight modification of a translation of the passage provided to me by Sigbjorn Sonnesyn.

(23) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

As was pointed out in §2.3, (23) is equivalent to:

(25) If anything cannot be thought not to exist, it is none other than You.

The conclusion of Stage Two, which Anselm validly deduced in *Proslogion* III and which was also validly deduced in the cosmological reformulation of Stage Two, on line (41) in §6.4, says:

(26) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

Two conclusions follow immediately from (23) and (26), that:
– Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is none other than You;
– You alone so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.
Christian Tapp wrote to me that: "I think that [23] is a premise of a very short and elegant argument".[26] I agree with that assessment, but, of course, those two conclusions are *beliefs* because they have been deduced directly from (23), which is a belief entailed by the belief (11).

So, it does matter that Anselm has not *proven* that God exists if his proof infers his conclusions directly from (23) and (26). For if he were to infer his conclusions directly from those two propositions, Stage Three of his proof would not be a proof at all. Yet Anselm clearly takes himself to have *proven* that God truly exists. Unless he has misinterpreted his own proof – which is too far-fetched a hypothesis – there must be more to Stage Three than that direct inference.

Discovering that both the reasons which Anselm presents are theological beliefs has answered the question of why Anselm introduced such a strong premise without justifying it. But that answer raises a more difficult question: How can Anselm take himself to have *proven* that God exists, when both his reasons presuppose that God is the Creator, and therefore exists?

6 Deducing Anselm's Two Conclusions as Proven Truths

It seems that Anselm's Stage Three argument has generated a paradox. For it seems that he is presenting two incompatible claims. On the one hand, both

26 Personal communication, 6 April 2020.

the premises he presents as the reasons why his two conclusions are true derive from his belief that God is the Creator of all other things. If his two conclusions are deduced as they have been in §8.5, then Anselm does not have a *proof* of the existence of God. On the other hand, the four passages of text cited in §8.5 imply that Anselm took himself to have *proven* those conclusions in a way which would be obvious to any rational mind, whether a believer or an unbeliever. How is it possible that both claims can be true?

It is little wonder that commentators disagree about whether he ever intended to prove that God exists! Yet Anselm had alerted his readers to the fact that that is how he would be proceeding, for he has already written, at the end of *Proslogion* 1:

> *And indeed I do not seek to understand, so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand. For I also believe this: that unless I believe, I shall not understand.*

Gregory Schufreider comments on that passage:

> While this Biblical citation with its Augustinian reverberations, does precede the argument of P2, far more revealing is the daring and distinctively Anselmian claim that concludes the argument in P4 and expresses the binding nature of reason: "even if I did not want to believe, I would be unable not to understand".[27]

The interplay between faith and reason is dramatically displayed by juxtaposing these two quotes, yet Anselm sees no opposition between faith and reason. To assume that one cannot be reasoning and believing at the same time is a much more modern and debilitating assumption. Anselm sets himself to produce this proof because he has a strong faith in reason as a God-given capacity. For he has begged that he be led by divine illumination to the point where he attains some insight into the most profound of mysteries.

To insist that rational truths cannot be derived from articles of faith is to pose the problem of how Anselm can prove his conclusions from his beliefs in a very acute way. To decide in advance that if Anselm has derived his premises from his belief in God as the Creator of all other things, he must be begging the question of God's existence is to shut off all that is distinctive about Anselm's thinking. It is, however, reasonable to ask: How could he *prove* that God exists

27 Gregory Schufreider 'The Ono-Theo-Logical Nature of Anselm's Metaphysics', *Philosophy Today*, 40 (1996), pp. 449–63, at pp. 472–3.

from his belief in the God described in the Nicene Creed without begging the question? That is the predicament.

There is one way out of this predicament. Since Anselm believes that the description of God in the Nicene Creed is true, he may legitimately introduce its first clause as an assumption. That is, it is legitimate to *assume* that (11) is true. He can then assert (23) as entailed by (11), and draw some consequences from it. But the dependence of those consequences upon (11) can be acquitted, *provided that, in the course of the argument, the belief from which Anselm has deduced his conclusions is discharged*.

By rendering (11) hypothetical in the course of the deduction, his conclusions would *not* be dependent upon his belief that God is the Creator of all other things, despite the fact that they have been deduced from that belief. That is the only way of ensuring that these conclusions are not dependent upon the assumption that God exists and is the Creator. By proving his conclusions in that way, he would have come to *understand* that they are true, even though he had derived them from what he *believes*, without begging the question. That way of deducing his conclusions is different from the way in which I articulated his reasoning in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, and in a way different from the short and elegant argument commended by Tapp.

So, if Anselm is to prove that God exists, he must adopt a more complicated argumentative strategy. Of course, since he expresses each step in this argument using the pronoun "You", all of the propositions involved will still be beliefs. Nevertheless, if he can free them from being dependent upon the assumption (11), he is entitled to claim to have *proven* that those beliefs are at the same time *proven truths*. Thereby, he will have progressed from mere belief to understanding. For he will have come to understand *why* the beliefs he has deduced are true because he would have established that they are beliefs which any rational mind could maintain.

All is now ready to articulate how Anselm could have deduced his conclusions. Let us begin, as we did in §8.5, with the second reason he offered as justifying the two conclusions he had declared. It has been demonstrated in §8.4 that the first clause of the Nicene Creed entails:

(23) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

In order to show how Anselm could have deduced those two conclusions from (23) as proven truths, the indirect procedure described above must be implemented.

Anselm often supposes the opposite of what he is intent on deducing in order to show that it is impossible, from which his conclusion then follows. So,

let us do the same. Instead of immediately invoking the conclusion of Stage Two, (26), let us replicate one of his favourite manoeuvres by supposing that the God whom he is addressing is *not* something-than-which-a-greater-cannot be-thought. Since "… is not something" is equivalent to "anything is not …", let us suppose that:

(27) Anything than which a greater cannot be thought is other than You, Lord our God.

It immediately follows from (23) and (27), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(28) Anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

Now, if Anselm is to *prove* that God truly exists, it is necessary that all the subsequent propositions which entail that conclusion be deduced in a way which does not depend upon either (11) or (23). I have explained how that is possible; Anselm's premise (23) can be discharged by invoking Conditional Proof to transpose it into the antecedent of a hypothetical proposition. So, it follows from (23) and (28), by Conditional Proof, that:

(29) If whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist, then anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

That discharges the premise (23), as Anselm must if his conclusions are to be proven. Since (29) is a hypothetical proposition, it is not dependent upon either (11) or (23). Rather, it is a conceptual truth expressing the validity of that implication. But (29) *is* dependent upon the supposition (27).

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (29), it follows that:

(30) If it can be thought that whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist, then it can be thought that anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

Deducing (30) invites the question: Can it be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist"?

Well, it has been shown in §8.4 that Anselm's premise (23) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, (11). So, it follows from (11) and (23), by Conditional Proof, that:

(31) If God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible, then whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

In §8.4 above, the wording of that creed was clarified and simplified by invoking the mutual entailment:

(12) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

So, given that equivalence, (31) may be simplified so that it follows from (12) and (31), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(32) If God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things, then whatever is other than Him can be thought not to exist.

Now, it has been shown in §8.4 above that:

(24) The God whom Anselm is addressing as "You, Lord our God" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

So, it follows from (24) and (32), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(33) If You are the Creator of all other things, then whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (33) yields:

(34) If it can be thought that You are the Creator of all other things, then it can be thought that whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

So, it follows from (30) and (34), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(35) If it can be thought that You are the Creator of all other things, then it can be thought that anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

This is where Anselm's first reason, (R1), becomes relevant. For I have shown in §8.3 that it follows from that little self-contained argument that:

(9) It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that You are the Creator of all other things.

It follows from (9) and (35), by *modus ponens*, that:

(36) It can be thought that anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

Now, (36) has been deduced from the supposition (27): that "Anything than which a greater cannot be thought is other than You, Lord our God". That dependence can be made explicit by invoking Conditional Proof. For it follows from (27) and (36) that:

(37) If anything than which a greater cannot be thought is other than You, Lord our God, then it can be thought that anything than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

But it is not possible to think, in the way in which a thing can be thought when the thing itself is understood, that the consequent of (37) is true. For it was demonstrated in Chapter 6 that Anselm has validly deduced the interim conclusion of Stage Two, that:

(6:38) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.

Since Anselm understands "… could not …" to mean "It is not possible that … can …", and since he maintains that (3:14) – "What is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood" – is a conceptual truth, it follows from (3:14) and (6:38) that:

(38) It cannot be thought that anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

Since (38) contradicts the consequent of (37), it follows from (37) and (38), by *modus tollens*, that:

(39) It is not possible that anything than which a greater cannot be thought is other than You, Lord our God.

So, even though Anselm's premise (23) is a belief entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, it has been proven that:

(40) It is necessary that You, Lord our God, alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

(40) follows validly because it is equivalent to (39). So, (40) has been proven in a way which is not dependent upon either the belief (23), which Anselm expressed as his premise, nor upon the belief enshrined in the Nicene Creed, (11).

By deducing (40), this Stage Three argument has deduced as a proven truth the belief which Anselm uttered before he began his argument in *Proslogion* II:

(B) And indeed we believe that You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.

(40) is logically equivalent to the belief which Anselm was avowing when he uttered the sentence (B). But when he avowed that proposition by uttering (B), it was merely a belief which he did not understand. But now he understands that same proposition to be a proven truth. It is, of course still a belief, because it expresses the personal commitments implicit in addressing God as "You". But it is *also* a proven truth. For it has been demonstrated that the conclusion (40) is validly deduced because both his ultimate premise (11) and his declared premise (23) have both been discharged in the course of the argument. Therefore, although Anselm has *deduced* that conclusion from the beliefs (11) and (23), it is not logically *dependent* upon those two beliefs.

Since (40) is a necessary truth which has been validly deduced, Anselm was more than justified in exclaiming, as he did in *Proslogion* III, that:

(40*) This is You, Lord our God.

Now, it was noted above that when Anselm declares his two conclusions in *Proslogion* III, he indicates that the second follows logically from the first by writing "and therefore". That indication is justified, for it has already been established as the final conclusion of Stage Two that:

(26) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

Since (26) is equivalent to "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it cannot be thought not to exist", it follows validly from (26) and (40), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(41) It is necessary that You, alone so truly exist that You cannot be thought not to exist.

Since Anselm himself is the one whose extraordinary insight has enabled him to construct this proof, he is entitled to express (46), as he did, as:

(41*) You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.

Thereby, he acknowledges his own commitment to the God whom he now *understands* to exist and to be *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. He has proven what at first he merely believed.

I submit that the fact that it has been possible to construct the argument above is confirmation that I have now correctly identified the source of what appeared to be his crucial premise (23). For many years I wrongly assumed that that premise had to be independent of any belief in God if Anselm's argument is to be valid, because I had assumed that when that crucial proposition is interpreted as a premise, it entails the existence of God. Recognizing that it is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed has enabled me to present what I now believe to be the argument Anselm had in mind when he wrote those two sentences as explaining why the two conclusions he addressed to God, (40*) and (41*), are true. This is the only way of reconciling the fact that his premises are beliefs with the fact that he took himself to have shown it to be obvious to any rational mind that God exists most greatly of all.

7 That God Exists Maximally

Anselm draws three corollaries from his conclusion (41*), two in *Proslogion* III, and another in *Reply* IV. The first concerns the status of the second reason he offers in Stage Three. In §8.4 it was established that:

(24) The God whom Anselm is addressing as "You, Lord our God" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

It has been demonstrated that Anselm has proven (41*): that "You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist". So, it follows from (24) and (41*), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(42) God the Father Almighty, and only He, so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist.

Since (42) has now been proven, it follows that (11) may be reaffirmed as a proven truth:

(43) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

Since the belief (11) has now been reaffirmed as the proven truth (43), and since (11) entails (23), it follows that (23) may now also be reasserted as a proven truth. That is:

(44) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

While (44) is the same proposition as (23), (44) is *not* dependent upon (11), for it is now entailed by the proven truth (43). (44) is the first corollary which Anselm infers explicitly in *Proslogion* III from (41*).

Secondly, since (41*) is a proven truth, it follows from (24) and (41*) that what Anselm asserts twice in *Reply* IV is unconditionally true, that:

(45) It is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.

That is the second corollary which Anselm deduces from (41*). Anselm is fully justified in asserting (45) twice in *Reply* IV.

Thirdly, in *Proslogion* III Anselm infers from (41*) and (44) that:

(46) You alone have being most truly [*verissime*] of all, and for that reason most greatly [*maxime*] of all.

This time he does explain why what he has written is true: "… because whatever is other [than You] does not exist so truly, and on that account has less being [*minus habet esse*]".[28] It is all too easy to overlook the significance of (46). I will return to discuss it in §13.1.

8 Anselm's Reiteration of His Conclusions

Anselm is not averse to expressing his conclusions using the third-person noun "God". He does so in the Preface and in *Proslogion* IV, where he reiterates the conclusions he has deduced in *Proslogion* III. But first, he has to resolve an apparent paradox. Having proven that God so truly exists that He cannot be thought not to exist, it seems that Anselm has proven that the Fool could not have thought what he manifestly has thought: that God does not exist. As was noted in §3.7, Anselm resolves this paradox by distinguishing between two ways in which a thing can be thought: when the word signifying it is thought, and when the thing itself is understood.

Anselm unequivocally asserts that, in the second way in which something can be thought, God cannot be thought not to exist. He asserts that as a conclusion already proven, not as a conclusion he is anticipating. He is entitled to do so because that conclusion has been proven in *Proslogion* III. The reason he gives is that "no one who *understands* that which God is [*id quod deus est*] can think that God does not exist". Again, he is citing what he has already proven, for "that which God is" is "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought".

In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I argued that Anselm need not have gone to the extreme of implying that the Fool said what he did *without any*, or with some *extraneous* signification. For there is a third way in which people fail to understand what is thought. It is certainly possible to use words with their proper signification, but then fail to *think through* the implications of what one has said. It is a common phenomenon that we think of something,

28 It is interesting that Anselm has expressed that conclusion in terms of '*having* being'. In *Monologion* XVI he argues that God does not *have* justice, but rather *is* justice. Likewise, I suggest he would have maintained that "You do not have being" [*habes esse*], but rather "You are being" [*es esse*]. I surmise that he did not write the latter because to say. "You are being" [*es esse*] is a rather strange sentence in both Latin and English.

understanding well enough what the words mean, but fail to think through the implications of what we have just thought.

There is also a fourth way of understanding how the Fool could have thought the unthinkable. He can think of something generically, without necessarily understanding 'that itself which the thing is [*id ipsum quod res est*]'. It is characteristic of thinking, as of all intentional states of mind, that what is thought of can be thought of only generically, as something-or-other so described, without calling to mind any particular thing which is properly so described. That is why Anselm could not base the second phase of his Stage One argument on what might be in the Fool's understanding. In *Reply* IX Anselm himself acknowledges this distinction, by constructing an argument which does not invoke *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in order to accommodate Gaunilo's protest that he cannot think of any particular thing of that sort.

Having drawn that distinction, Anselm reiterates what he takes himself to have proven. He writes: "For God is *that* than which a greater cannot be thought". Thereby, he is no longer expressing his first conclusion in the first-to-second-person discourse of prayer; he has *transposed* that belief into the third-person indicative discourse standardly used to assert facts. That shows both that he has no problem with expressing his proven beliefs as facts, and that he is willing to assert his conclusions in a way which is publicly accessible.

But Anselm is also sensitive to the different nuances expressed in these two different styles of discourse. He is aware that expressing beliefs in the factual style of third-person discourse requires special care. Consider the second conclusion he has proven:

> (41*) You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.

That is a plain, straightforward and unequivocal declaration of faith, which is also now a proven truth. Not only is it addressed to "Lord my God" as its subject, but it explicitly refers to Anselm himself as the speaker. But when in *Proslogion* IV he expresses that same conclusion in factual third-person discourse, what he says is:

> *For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought* [id quo maius cogitari non potest]. *Whoever properly* [bene: well] *understands this understands at least that this same thing is such a being that not even in thought can it not exist. Therefore, whoever understands that God is such a being cannot think that He does not exist.*

I believe that it is significant that Anselm asserts that last sentence rather than simply asserting: "*Therefore, God so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist*". That would be the direct transposition of his conclusion into third-person discourse. Rather, because he is now stating this conclusion in the factual style of third-person discourse, he qualifies it by ensuring that the personal involvement of speakers who say "You" does not drop out. That is why, when he expresses his identification of God as "*that thing* [*id*] than which a greater cannot be thought", he embeds it within the scope of "Whoever properly understands this [i.e., that than which a greater cannot be thought] understands that …".

That is also why it is a mistake to interpret his argument which establishes those conclusions as if it were a rationalistic proof like the theorems in Euclidean geometry. It is a proof in the more modest sense of validly deducing the implications of what is spoken of [*quod dixit*]. For Anselm holds dear the principle that people must own what they say, and what they say expresses their commitments.

Not only is that clear from how he reiterates his conclusions in *Proslogion* IV, but we saw in §8.5 that is also how he characterized his proof in *Reply* X. His beliefs about God remain beliefs, but they have been demonstrated to be beliefs which it is rational to believe because they are now underwritten by his having proven that that very thing than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists and is whatever it is proper to believe about the nature of God.

He needs that qualification, because, while he has no reservations about declaring to God his justified beliefs, when those same beliefs are stated as proven facts, it is no longer evident that they are beliefs. He knows that his premises are sound, and that the deduction of his conclusions is valid, but he also knows that logic does not compel belief. He knows full well that someone could follow his argument closely, validating each step, but remain unconvinced that the conclusions are true. He realizes that the most he can claim for his argument is that whoever genuinely follows its reasoning *can* come to *understand* that it is not possible to think that God does not exist. But it still does not follow necessarily that such readers *will believe* that it is not possible to think that God does not exist. For believing is an act of commitment which people perform. And propositions, no matter how plausible, do not compel actions.

Accordingly, when in the last sentence of *Proslogion* IV Anselm reverts again to writing in the second person to thank God for giving him his new understanding, he makes this very point with a delightfully ironic twist:

> *I give thanks to You, good Lord, I give thanks to You, because what I first believed by Your gift, I now understand by Your illumination in such a way that even if I should not want to believe it, I would be unable not to understand that You exist.*

This passage is unambiguous. Obviously, its role is to be a marker indicating that he has completed the first two objectives which in the Preface he said that his *unum argumentum* suffices to prove. Anselm could not have given thanks for reaching this understanding, if his two conclusions were still somehow provisional, or dependent upon other theological beliefs. On the contrary, he has achieved the understanding which he was seeking. That he invokes the Church official creed that God is the maker of all other things to reach that understanding does not *invalidate* that achievement; on the contrary, it is what has made it *possible*.

CHAPTER 9

Anselm's Cosmological Argument That Only God Could Not Be Thought Not to Exist

In §2.2 I introduced the argument which Anselm presents in *Reply* IV designed to prove that "All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme", based on a set of criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist. I explained there why in my two previous books on Anselm's proof I interpreted that argument as a cosmological justification of his Stage Three premise, "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist". For it seemed reasonable to interpret that argument as designed to rectify his omitting to justify that premise in *Proslogion* III.

But I am now convinced that Anselm mounted this argument for a different purpose. For when the context surrounding this argument is taken into account, it becomes evident that he is responding directly to a proposal which Gaunilo had put to him in the final chapter of *On Behalf of the Fool*. Gaunilo had proposed that it would have been better if Anselm had argued that God could not be *understood* not to exist, rather than saying that He could not be *thought* not to exist. Anselm rejects that proposal, because, on that basis, it would not be a distinctive property of God that He could not be *understood* not to exist. In this chapter I shall interpret the argument which Anselm produces in *Reply* IV as designed to establish that only God could not be thought not to exist, and leave the issue of justifying Anselm's Stage Three premise to be addressed in the following chapter.

As I contended in §1.6.2, that God alone could not be thought not to exist is the linchpin of Anselm's three-stage strategy to prove the existence of God. His argumentative strategy is to establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought not only exists in reality, but also that it could not be thought not to exist. For establishing the latter ensures that what is true of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is true of God alone. Replacing that property which is unique to God with Gaunilo's alternative suggestion would destroy the argumentative strategy which Anselm deploys over the three stages of his proof. It was imperative that Anselm defend his proof by justifying that claim.

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1 Anselm's Criteria Which Determine What Can Be Thought Not to Exist

Anselm begins his *Reply* to Gaunilo's critique by briefly summarizing Gaunilo's objection to the argument in *Proslogion* II, and by reasserting his confidence in the validity of that argument. He then presents the three arguments discussed in Chapter 5. He next writes:

> *I should say something further here. Without doubt whatever is not in some place and some time, even if it is in some other place and at some other time, can yet be thought to be in no place and at no time, just as it is not in some place and at some time.*

Introducing the topic with those remarks does not provide the reader with any reason why Anselm thought that he should introduce it. Looking through what he says subsequently, it seems that he has launched into this exploration of the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist because he claims that none of these criteria apply to something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. For he then uses that finding to challenge Gaunilo's assertion that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be understood and is not in the understanding.

Anselm supports the first claim he has made by writing:

> *For whatever has not existed yesterday and exists today, just as it is understood not to have existed yesterday, can be understood as having never existed. And what does not exist here but exists elsewhere, insofar as it does not exist here, can be thought to exist nowhere.*

Those two sentences might seem counterintuitive. For, it might be said, if I *know* that something exists today, I cannot *understand* it to have never existed. Similarly, I cannot *understand* it to have not existed at some place.

It seems, however, that in these sentences Anselm is making a different point: these are criteria of what can be *thought* not to exist, in the second of the ways which Anselm distinguished in *Proslogion* IV. That is, he is not denying that I would be puzzled if I were told that something which I know exists today has never existed. Rather, he is insisting that whatever does not exist at some time, such as yesterday, can be understood as *able* never to exist, even if it does exist today, for whatever is not at some time is not the kind of thing which exists necessarily. Similarly, what is not in some place can be understood never to have been at any place, for the same reason. That is surely correct.

The next criterion Anselm proposes in *Reply* I is that:

> *Similarly* [in the case of things] *whose individual parts are not where and when its other parts are, all its parts and therefore the whole thing itself can be thought to be never and nowhere*.

In *Reply* I he then applies that criterion to time and to 'the world', by which he means what we now call 'the universe'. These comments are undoubtedly cosmological in character:

> *For even if it should be said that time always is and the world is everywhere, yet the former is not always as a totality* [totum] *nor is the latter everywhere as a totality. And just as the separate parts of time are not when the others are, so they can be thought of as being at no time. And so the separate parts of the world, just as they are not where the others are, can be understood as being nowhere*.

This is a very interesting passage. Anselm would have been aware that Augustine had argued that God created heaven and earth *with* time, not *in* time. For that reason, time began when the world began. So, it could be expected that Anselm would assert, in agreement with Augustine, that the world had a beginning.

However, it seems that he was aware that the question of whether the world has existed forever, or had a beginning, had been much debated for more than a millennium.[1] For he introduces his claim that both time and the world can be thought not to exist with the concession that "even if it should be said that time always is and the world is everywhere".

It is just as well that Anselm chose to argue for his thesis that 'the world' can be thought not to exist on the basis that it consists of separable parts, not on its having a beginning. For in the light of modern cosmology, there never was a time when the universe as a whole did not exist, because time, space, matter, and energy are all fused. So if the universe as a whole had a beginning, time began with it; there is no time when the universe does not exist. It was for

1 Aristotle had argued in his *Physics* that the world could not have had a beginning. Although that book was unavailable in Western Europe in the 11th Century, that view was widespread in ancient times. For example, the Neoplatonic philosopher, Proclus, who lived from 412 to 485 AD, proposed eighteen proofs for the eternity of the world, based on the divinity of its creator. He articulated these proofs in his *De Aeternitate Mundi*, which elicited a rebuttal by John Philoponus in 529. Ian Logan (pp. 9–13) concludes from an examination of Anselm's writings and the literature available at Bec that Anselm was well educated and widely read. So he is likely to have had at least some awareness of these debates.

that very reason that the second premise of our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof sets aside the universe as a whole.

Although Anselm could not have had even an inkling of modern cosmology, he seems intuitively to know that it would be prudent to sidestep these complicated issues. For he argues that the 'world' can be thought not to exist on the different basis that time and 'the world' have parts which are separable. In this context, his concept of "the world" [*mundus*] is meant to encompass both heaven and earth; it is analogous to the modern concept of the universe, even if his concept of "the world" is somewhat more primitive and not as extensive as ours. His criterion of the separability of the parts which compose things refers to the fact that the parts of things have both spatial and temporal limits. This criterion focusses on the fact that both time and space are extended and are therefore divisible. Anselm then elaborates these criteria at considerable length, arguing that things composed of parts can be decomposed, either actually or at any rate in thought. For Anselm adds, "*Whatever is a conjunction of parts can be dissolved by thought and not exist*".

The passage quoted above introduces a new and significant concept. Because time is extended, he says that it is not always 'as a totality', or 'as a whole' [*totum*]. Nor is 'the world' everywhere 'as a totality' or 'as a whole'. These points are easy enough to understand. Time and space are continuous and extended; time is not simply a conjunction of instants, nor is space simply a conjunction of points. Since instants and points have no extension, a mere conjunction of them could not generate a period or a distance. To define some period in terms of two different instants, or a distance in terms of two different points, is to presuppose that time and space are extended. Things are likewise extended in space and time, and so the whole of a thing could not be contained in a single point at an instant. He concludes, "*Therefore, whatever is not somewhere or at some time as a totality can be thought not to exist, even if it does exist*".

It is at this point that he draws a contrast, commenting:

> *But it is not possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, if it exists. Otherwise, if it exists, it is not something than which a greater could not be thought.*

I argued in Chapter 6 that that implication is justified by the deduction in §6.2 of Anselm's Stage Two premise from the strong version of his Stage One conclusion. From that observation Anselm draws the following consequence in *Reply* 1:

> *Therefore, in no way does it* [i.e., something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *not exist as a totality* [totum] *somewhere and at some time, but it exists always and everywhere as a totality* [totum].

Although I have just said that it is easy enough to understand how things which are extended both in space and time do not exist in their entirety at an instant, or at a point, it is not so easy to understand what it means for something "to exist always and everywhere as a totality".

Although it will become clear that, according to Anselm, only God exists in that way, it is intriguing that Anselm comments in *Monologion* XXI that "some human being [*aliquis homo*] exists as a totality yesterday, today, and tomorrow". In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I explained that comment by suggesting that what Anselm might mean by "existing as a totality" at some place and some time can be explicated in the light of certain Aristotelian concepts. Although the most relevant Aristotelian works, his *Physics* and his *Metaphysics*, did not become accessible in Western Europe until the following century, Anselm might well have had access to debates which drew upon these concepts.

The explanation begins with some points which might not seem to have anything to do with the question, but they will become relevant. One of the basic distinctions in Aristotle's metaphysics is between change – which he also calls movement, *kinesis* – and actuality: *entelecheia*. What he means by the latter is that an action, such as building a house, has a *telos*, an end-state which marks its completion. Other kinds of change, however, such as seeing and living well, are ends in themselves, and are complete at every moment, as long as they last. Aristotle cites the following example in *Metaphysics* 32:

> For one is not walking and at the same time in a state of having walked, nor building a house and in a state of having built a house, nor becoming and having become … but one has seen and at the same time is seeing the same thing, and is contemplating and has contemplated the same thing.

I take Aristotle's point to be that when someone is performing some action, such as building a house, the actions which are directed towards building it are not fully performed until the house is completely built. While it takes time to build a house, that action has not been performed successfully until the task is finished. At that moment, all the activities involved in building are at an end because they have done all the work required of them. The potential house has become an actuality.

In contrast, while we perform activities such as 'seeing', or 'living well', they are done differently. They are ends in themselves and complete at every

moment for as long as the activity lasts. That is, when I am looking at some object, my activity of looking achieves what I am intending to do: namely seeing that object; the activity of seeing continues to be successful at *every* moment that I am looking at it. And if I keep on looking at it for a long time, my seeing it is both continuous throughout that period, and is successful for every moment of that period.

Why all this is relevant to existing as a totality is that Aristotle says this is also true of human beings; we are completely who we are at every moment of our lives. That is a very intriguing thought. While actions such as 'building a house' lead to an end (the '*telos*' of the action) which lies 'beyond' and is incomplete as long as the end is not reached, living well is not like that. Anyone who is living well achieves that state of wellbeing day after day, after day. It seems that when Anselm writes that "a man exists as a totality yesterday, today, and tomorrow", he has in mind this idea that each of us succeeds in being who we are at every moment of our lives, for as long as we live. That is why I am wholly present at every moment of my life; who I am here and now is not some time-slice of me, as some modern philosophers allege. Like the activity of seeing, I succeed in presenting myself as a totality at every moment of my lifetime, and that is true of every one of us.

Nevertheless, while I have lived as an integrated whole at every moment for quite a long time, and in quite a number of different places, I too am limited; I have not been wholly present at *every* time and *every* place. There are hugely more times when, and hugely many more places where, I have not existed. My way of existing is, therefore, such that I too can be thought not to exist.

We have seen in §8.4 that it is crucial to Anselm's proof of the existence of God that whatever is other than the God whom he is addressing can be thought not to exist. So, setting apart that which is supreme, Anselm has mounted a strong case for concluding that everything else can be thought *not* to exist, even when it does exist. For whatever has a beginning or an end, or can be broken into parts – either actually, or at least in thought – can be thought not to exist.

2 Anselm's Defence of His Use of "Cannot Be Thought"

Amongst Gaunilo's many objections to Anselm's proof, two, if they were successful, would have the effect of undermining Anselm's Stage Three argument.

Firstly, Gaunilo suggests that it was inappropriate of Anselm to have chosen to argue that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and consequently God, could not be thought not to exist. In *On Behalf of the Fool* 11 Gaunilo says that:

> It could hardly be credible that, when this thing [i.e., something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] has been spoken and heard of, it could not be thought not to exist, in the way that it is possible that even God does not exist. For if this is not possible, why is the whole disputation taken up against someone denying or doubting that there is such a nature?

Gaunilo is arguing that since Anselm is taking the Fool's denial seriously, Anselm is conceding that it *can* be thought that God does not exist. In making that objection, Gaunilo shows no sign of having recognized the distinction Anselm draws in *Proslogion* IV between the two different ways in which something can be thought not to exist. For Anselm has already dealt with that issue by explaining how the Fool could have thought what could not be thought. The Fool could think the word which signifies God, but he does not *understand* that thing which God is – that than which a greater cannot be thought – for if he did, he could not think that God does not exist.

Gaunilo has a second point to make in the final chapter of his *On Behalf of the Fool*. He there makes the suggestion to which I referred in the introduction of this chapter:

> But when it is said that this supreme thing [*summa res ista*] could not be *thought* not to exist, it would perhaps have been better said that it could not be *understood* that it does not exist or that it even could be non-existent. For according to the proper meaning of this word, false things [*falsa*] cannot be understood, although they can undoubtedly be thought in the same way that the Fool thought there is no God.

Gaunilo backs up this suggestion by arguing that, while he knows with absolute certainty that he himself exists, he also knows that he is *able not to exist*. He adds that "I certainly understand that that which is supreme, which is, of course, God, both exists and could not be non-existent".

However, he says, "I do not know whether I *could think* that I do not exist, while I know with absolute certainty that I do".[2] He then poses a dilemma:

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2 Gaunilo has here anticipated Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum*. Perhaps Gaunilo was aware that Augustine had argued in his *City of God* (Book XI, 26) against the sceptics who claimed that no-one could be certain of anything: "I am not at all afraid of the academicians who say, 'What if you are deceived?'. For if I am deceived, I am." As discussed in Goebel and Tapp, 'Der kosmologische Gottesbeweis des Ralph von Battle. Analyse, Kritik und Einordnung', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (forthcoming 2022), a similar argument can be found in *De*

> If I could think that I do not exist, why can I not also think this of something else which I know with the same degree of certainty [i.e., God]. But if I could not think that I do not exist, then this will not be a distinctive property of God [*proprium deo*].

Having posed that dilemma, Gaunilo has finished all his objections, and commends the remainder of Anselm's 'little book'.

In *Reply* IV Anselm responds to both Gaunilo's objections, first of all explaining why he is unwilling to adopt Gaunilo's suggestion, then mounting the argument I foreshadowed in the introduction to this chapter. Only after he has laid out that argument does he respond to Gaunilo's doubts about whether he can *think* that he himself does not exist.

We have already noted in §3.7 that in *Reply* IV Anselm roundly rejects Gaunilo's suggestion. He begins his response by repeating Gaunilo's challenge:

> *You say, when it is said that this supreme thing* [summa res ista] *cannot be thought not to exist, it would perhaps be better to say that it could not be* understood *not to exist, or could not exist. However, it would have been preferable to say "it could not be* thought" [not to exist].

I draw attention to his adoption of the phrase which Gaunilo had used to describe God: "this supreme thing" [*summa res ista*]. Gaunilo had said that this thing is "of course, God" [*scilicet deus*]. So, when Anselm subsequently uses the same expression to refer to God, he is taking it for granted that that which is supreme is God. He continues:

> *If I had said that the thing itself could not be* understood *not to exist, perhaps you would object that nothing which exists could not be understood not to exist, because you say, according to the proper meaning of the word, false things cannot be understood. For it is false that what exists does not exist.*

Anselm then repeats what Gaunilo himself had observed:

> *Therefore, it is not a distinctive property of to God* [proprium deo] *that He could not be* understood *not to exist. For if some of those things which most certainly exist can be understood not to exist, then in a similar way, also*

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nesciente et sciente [*The Ignorant and the Knower*] by Ralph, the abbot of Battle, who lived from 1040 to 1124, and was a student and friend of Anselm.

> *certain other things could be understood not to exist. But clearly this objection cannot be raised against thought, if it is considered properly.*

It is crucial to Anselm's arguments that all those things which are in space and time are able not to exist, and consequently, can be thought not to exist. Gaunilo's suggestion would undercut that basic metaphysical principle, so critical for his proof of the existence of God.

3 Anselm's Argument That All But One Can Be Thought Not to Exist

Anselm then introduces his positive argument by asserting the conclusion which he is about to prove:

> *For even if nothing which exists can be* understood *not to exist, yet all things can be* thought *not to exist, apart from that which is supreme.*

Although Anselm had discussed at length in *Reply* I the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist, he returns to reiterate them even more explicitly in *Reply* IV. For the first premise of this argument is a summary of those criteria which he had identified in *Reply* I. Beginning with "*Indeed*", he writes:

> (1) *All those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end or are a conjunction of parts – as I have already said, whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality – could be thought not to exist.*

By saying that "all those things, and only they", he is saying that those criteria are both necessary and sufficient for something to be thought not to exist. That Anselm presents this definitive statement of the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist is confirmation of the appropriateness of the reformulated Stage One argument presented in Chapter 4. For those criteria are satisfied by every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time.

In (1), Anselm is equating "all those things which have a beginning, or an end, or are a conjunction of parts" with "whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality". Since the contrapositive of any proposition is equivalent to the original, (1) is equivalent to:

(2) Something cannot be thought not to exist if, and only if, it does not have a beginning or an end, nor is a conjunction of parts, but is something which is always and everywhere as a totality.

It follows that such a thing would exist because the contrapositive of his Conceivability rule implies that it is valid to infer from "It cannot be thought that not-*p*" that "It is necessary that *p*". And "It is necessary that *p*" implies "*p*". So, it follows from that rule that if something could not be thought not to exist, it exists.

Immediately after writing (1), Anselm writes "*Rather*":

(3) *That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking* [cogitatio] *finds neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality*.

When Anselm asserts (3), he is making three claims. The first is that "that … in which thinking finds neither beginning nor end, nor a conjunction of parts" is the same as "whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality". We have seen in §4.6 that whatever has a beginning exists at some time, but does not exist at some previous time. And in *Reply* III Anselm extends that to whatever has both a beginning and an end, as we saw in §7.8. Moreover, it is obvious that those things which have parts cease to exist if they are broken up – in thought, if not in actuality. So the first claim in (3) is justified.

The second claim is "That … cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking finds neither beginning nor end, nor a conjunction of parts". That is what (2), the contrapositive of (1) says. It also seems clear that such a thing could not be thought not to exist, because there would be no time when, nor any place where, it does not exist. And if it has no parts, it could not be broken up, not even by thinking, so it would exist as a totality. So the second claim in (3) is justified.

The third claim is that that *alone* which thinking finds always and everywhere as a totality cannot be thought not to exist. The truth of that claim is not so clear. Why can there be *only one* thing "in which thinking finds neither beginning nor end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality"? For that is the reason Anselm provides for asserting that there is *only one* thing which cannot be thought not to exist. Why cannot thinking find more than one thing which is always and everywhere as a totality?

If Anselm had provided a plausible answer to that question, his uniqueness premise (3) would be justified. Unfortunately, he says nothing in the *Reply* to explain *why* thinking cannot find more than one thing which is always and everywhere as a totality. Perhaps Anselm took it to be obvious that thinking could not find more than one such thing.

If (3) is true, it follows from (1) and (3) that:

(4) *All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme.*

That the sole thing which cannot be thought not to exist exists supremely follows from his arguing in the first half of *Proslogion* III something which could not be thought not to exist is greater than what can be thought not to exist. Anselm did not attempt to identify "that which is supreme" as "God", but that would be simply because Gaunilo had already stated that "that which is supreme, is, of course, God". This too is a simple and elegant argument.

Immediately after writing (3), Anselm rebukes Gaunilo for suggesting that he cannot think that he does not exist, writing:

> *Therefore, I reply that you can think that you do not exist, even while you know that you most certainly do exist. I am amazed that you said you did not know this.*

Anselm is right to reject Gaunilo's conjecture, since it is false that whatever in space and time exists cannot be thought not to exist; everything in the universe exists at some time, but not at some other time. So everything in the universe, including Gaunilo himself, can be thought not to exist.

That it is a distinctive property of the God whom Anselm is addressing that He could not be thought not to exist, was validly deduced in Chapter 8 on line (45). Since Gaunilo himself had identified "this supreme thing" as God, Anselm saw no need to argue here that (4) is equivalent to:

(5) All things can be thought not to exist, apart from God.

Having clarified the way in which it is not possible to think that something does not exist while we know that it does, Anselm then draws the conclusion which he had foreshadowed and towards which this argument has been directed:

(6) It is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.

4 Anselm's Struggles to Understand Eternity

It is disconcerting that Anselm does not even attempt to justify why thinking can find only one thing which has neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality, as (3) asserts. As I said above, maybe he thought it to be obvious.

Looking for some reason why only one thing could be always and everywhere as a totality, I noticed that in the *Monologion*, where Anselm devotes seven chapters to discussing how the Supreme Being is "always and everywhere". Already in *Monologion* XIV Anselm had established to his own satisfaction that the Supreme Being is *in* all things and *through* all things, and that all things exist *from* it, *through* it, and *in* it.[3] Since this Being is not nothing, Anselm infers that therefore it is *everywhere* and *through* all things, and *in* all things.

It is all too easy to simply accept this claim without reflecting on the immense significance of what Anselm is claiming here. He is claiming that it is at once clear that this Supreme Being itself is what both undergirds and transcends everything else; it confines and permeates them [*cuncta alia portat et superat, claudit et penetrat*]. I find that an extraordinarily strong claim, with profound implications. For not only does it imply that Supreme Being is here right now, permeating both me and you, in every part of our being, but it implies that it is also in every disaster which befalls us, and in every wicked deed ever performed. The so-called 'problem of evil' is not only about why the Supreme Being *allows* such bad events to occur, but why He Himself supports and permeates them all. However, this is too complex an issue to tackle here.

On the other hand, if we take what Anselm is saying literally, it seems to me that there is no fundamental difficulty of a conceptual sort in believing that God is incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. For if God permeates everything in the whole universe which He has created, as Anselm claims, He could be incarnate in a special way in a single person, should He so will. Anselm addresses that issue in his *Cur Deus Homo*.

4.1 *That the Supreme Being Is in Every Place and Time*

After discussing in *Monologion* XV to XVII how God may appropriately be described, Anselm returns to the theme of God's relation to time, arguing in *Monologion* XVIII that this Supreme Being is without beginning or end. His reason for that is that the Supreme Nature is from [*ex*] and through [*per*]

3 *Quod illa sit in omnibus et per omnia, et omnia sint ex illa et per illa et in illa.*

itself, because in no way could it be from or through another, nor from or through nothing.

In *Monologion* XIX Anselm explores the difficulties generated by the word "nothing". He argues that to assert that "there was a time before itself when nothing existed, and that there will be a time after itself when nothing will exist" is ambiguous and must be interpreted as saying that there was not anything 'before' the Supreme Being. That makes sense, for if the Supreme Being has neither a beginning nor an end, there is no time 'before' the Supreme Being exists.

This leads Anselm to argue in *Monologion* XX that the Supreme Being is in every place and at all times. He notes that it was concluded above that this creating nature exists everywhere, and in all things, and through all things. And he infers from the fact that it neither began, nor will cease to be, that it *always has been*, and *is*, and *will be*. But Anselm then comments:

> *Yet I perceive a certain soft murmuring of a contradiction which compels me to investigate more carefully where and when this* [Nature] *exists*.

He begins this investigation by observing that the Supreme Being *either* is everywhere and always [*ubique et semper*], or merely somewhere and sometimes [*alicubi et aliquando*], or nowhere and never [*nusquam et numquam*], or as he expresses it, either in every place or time, or within limits [*determinate*] in some, or in none. But what could be more incompatible than saying that that which exists supremely and most truly exists nowhere and never? Furthermore, since no good thing – indeed, nothing at all – exists without the Supreme Good, if it is nowhere and never then everything is nowhere and never. There is no need to say how false that is. So Anselm concludes on both grounds that it is false that it is nowhere and never.

That leaves the possibilities that the Supreme Nature either exists within limits somewhere and sometimes, or else everywhere and always. As for the first alternative, Anselm writes:

> *Now if it exists within limits somewhere or sometime, it is only in that place and time, where and when it exists, that anything can exist. Where and when it does not exist, moreover, there is entirely no existence* [essentia], *because, without it, nothing exists. From this it follows that there is some place and some time where and when nothing at all exists. But since that is false – for in fact a place itself and a time itself are something – the Supreme Nature cannot exist within limits somewhere or sometime*.

He concludes that, "*Since, then, it does not exist within limits somewhere and sometime, it must exist everywhere and always, that is, in every place and time*".

4.2 *That the Supreme Being Is in No Place or Time*

Anselm then argues in *Monologion* XXI for the opposite conclusion: that that [being] is in no place or time. He argues that if it is everywhere and always, either it is as a totality in every place and time, or else only a part of it so exists, so that another part is outside the whole of place and time. But if that were so, it would have parts, which is false. Therefore it does not exist partly everywhere and always.

But how then does it exist as a totality everywhere and always? For either it is understood to exist as a totality once and for all in all places or at all times and by parts in each individual place and time, or it is as a totality in each individual place and time as well. But if the latter is so, it is not exempt from the composition and division of parts, which is altogether foreign to the Supreme Nature. Hence, it does not exist as a totality in all places and times in such a way that it exists by parts in individual places or times.

The other part of the issue which remains to be discussed is: How the Supreme Nature exists as a totality in everything and in individual places and times. This is doubtless impossible, unless it either is all at once, or at different times. Up to this point it has been possible to pursue the investigation of the rule of place [*ratio loci*] and the rule of time [*ratio temporis*] in a single discussion because they advance along the same lines. But Anselm sees that those two lines of inquiry now diverge, and must be investigated in separate discussions.

He first takes up the question whether the Supreme Nature could exist as a totality in individual places, either all at once, or through different times. He argues, on that basis, that there is nothing of what exists as a totality in whichever space is outside that place at the same time. Since one totality cannot exist all at once in different places as a totality, it follows that, if something exists as a totality in an individual place all at once, then for individual places, there are individual totalities. Therefore, if the Supreme Nature is as a totality at one time in every individual place, there are as many Supreme Natures as there could be individual places, which he thinks it is irrational to suppose. Therefore, the Supreme Nature does not exist as a totality in individual places at different times. So, if it does not exist as a totality in individual places either at the same time or at different times, it is clear that it in no way is as a totality in all individual places.

Anselm then turns to the other question: whether that same supreme nature exists as a totality at individual times, either all at once or at distinctly

different times. He asks, "*How does something exist as a totality at individual times all at once if those times themselves do not exist all at once*?" On the other hand, if it is as a totality separately and distinctly at individual times, in the way that a human being is as a totality yesterday, today, and tomorrow, then it is correct to say that it was and is and will be. Therefore, its age, which is nothing other than its eternity, does not exist as a totality all at once; instead, it is extended in parts through the parts of time.

But yet, Anselm insists, its eternity is nothing other than itself. Therefore the Supreme Being will be divided into parts according to the distinctness of times. For if its age is produced by the flow of times, it has a past, present, and future along with those times. But what is its age, or the duration of its existence, other than its eternity? He writes:

> *Therefore, since its eternity is nothing other than his very self* [eius essentia] *... if its eternity has a past, a present, and a future, its very being consequently has a past, a present, and a future.*

But that is not possible, since it implies that this Supreme Nature has parts distributed according to times. He has already established that the Supreme Nature is in no way composite, but instead is supremely simple, and supremely unchangeable. He infers: "*By no means, then, is past or future attributable to the creative Being*".

Reflecting further on this outcome, Anselm eventually concludes that it is impossible that the Supreme Nature is always and everywhere. So, by the end of *Monologion* XXI Anselm has argued himself into accepting the following contradiction:

> *It is necessary that the Supreme Nature is everywhere and always.*
> *It is impossible that the Supreme Nature is everywhere and always.*

That he argues so explicitly for each side of this discomforting contradiction, and then investigates how it might be dissolved, is a manifestation of his intellectual honesty.

4.3 *Anselm's Way of Dissolving the Contradiction*

Since so many commentators ascribe views to Anselm which are inconsistent with the text, let me emphasize that he *never* rejects either of these statements. His strategy is to find a way of understanding what is true in each in order to reconcile these two conclusions. He is clearly writing at the very edges of what can be thought as he sets out to confront this contradiction and dissolve

it, while maintaining the truths to which both of those inconsistent conclusions point.

When commentators discuss these four chapters in the *Monologion*, they mostly take Anselm to be simply elaborating the remarks on "eternity" he read in Boethius. But I interpret him as doing something very different. I see him carefully working out a quite novel and radically different proposal as to the character of eternity, a proposal which has not been fully appreciated by modern commentators.

He begins by wondering how these two propositions, "*so contrary according to their pronouncement, and so necessary according to the proof*" are to be reconciled. His first move towards that end is to comment:

> *It seems that nothing is subject to this law* [lege] *of space and time except those things which so exist in space or time that they do not go beyond the extension of space or the duration of time. That is why one and the same totality cannot exist all at once, as a totality, in different places or times. But in the case of those which are not of this sort, such a conclusion is not necessarily implied.*
>
> *For it seems that it is right to say that, "Some place is only predicable of a thing the size of which encloses* [continet] *a place by delimiting it, and delimits by enclosing it* [continendo]; *and that some time is only predicable of a thing whose duration time ends by measuring it, and measures by ending it*".[4]

As he says, "*No law* [*lex*] *of place and time in any way governs a nature which no place or time limits by some kind of restraint* [continentia]". So, the Substance which creates and is supreme amongst all beings is not bound by, but is free from, the nature and law of all things it has created. It is limited by no restraint of space or time. On this basis, Anselm argues that:

> *Whatever is in no way confined* [coercetur] *by the restraint* [continentia] *of space or time is not compelled by any law of places or times to a multiplicity of parts, nor is it prevented from being present as a totality all at once* [praesens totum simul] *at more places than one*.

4 The statement quoted is: *Tantum eius rei sit aliquis locus, cuius quantitatem locus circumscribendo continent et continendo circumscribat; et quod eius solum rei sit aliquod tempus, cuius diuturnitatem tempus metiendo aliquidmoodo teminat et terminando meritur*.

It is striking how often Anselm invokes variants of the verb "*continere*" in expounding this analysis. That verb is standardly translated into English as "contains",[5] but that translation is quite inappropriate as a translation of what I understand Anselm to be asserting. For example, when Anselm asserts in *Monologion* XXIII that the Supreme Nature is not more truly in all places than in all those things which exist, the rest of the sentence is standardly translated as "in them not as if it were *contained* by them, but because he *contains* them all by pervading them all".[6] That is a misrepresentation, since to say that the Supreme Being "contains" all places and times only makes sense if it is itself extended in space and time; any container has to occupy a region of space *into which* something can be put. But in this passage Anselm is explicitly *denying* that the Supreme Being is extended in either space or time. So "contains" is a quite inept translation of "*continet*", even though that translation is so common.

In fact, this Latin verb conveys a much richer array of nuances than the English verb "contains".[7] The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* lists the following short definition of this verb:

> To hold together, bound, limit, comprise, enclose, surround, environ.

That is why in the first passage quoted from *Monologion* XXII it was appropriate to translate that verb as "enclose" and its gerund, "*continendo*" as "enclosing". For that nuance is what expresses Anselm's point: the size of a thing is 'enclosed' by being delimited in a region of space, and that region of space is what delimits its boundaries. And that is also why the noun, "*continentia*", derived from that verb, is appropriately translated as "restraint".

Just as it is quite inappropriate to translate that *Monologion* XXIII passage quoted above using the verb "contains", it is equally inappropriate to translate it as "enclose" when the subject of that verb is the Supreme Being, or God. Whatever 'encloses' something else has to be spatially extended, so that translation is open to the same objection as to translating that verb as "contains" when its subject is either "the Supreme Being" or "God". So, how is Anselm's

5 "*Continet*" is translated as "contains" in both the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* by Hopkins & Richardson, Hopkins, and Williams, and also in the *Proslogion* by Charlesworth, Marenbon, Rogers, Logan, Walz, and others.

6 That is how Thomas Williams translates this clause. Jasper Hopkins also translated "*continet*" as "contains", translating the clause as "in them not as what is *contained*, but as what *contains* all things by its pervasive presence" (*A New Interpretative Translation of Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion*, p. 38). The italics in both quotes are mine.

7 Ashdowne et al: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*. Online as "Logeion" at https://logeion.uchicago.edu/lexidium.

use of this highly significant verb appropriately rendered in translating this *Monologion* XXIII passage? After trying out various possibilities, I submit that the most suitable English verb is "uphold". For it makes sense to translate what Anselm is claiming in that passage as:

> *The Supreme Nature is not more truly in all places than in all those things which exist – not as if it were upheld* [contineatur] *by them, but as if it were upholding them* [contineat] *by permeating them all.*

That leads him to point out that when the Supreme Being is said to exist in space or time, while the mentioning of it and of localized or temporal natures is properly the same, because of the customary way of speaking, yet the understanding of it is different because the things themselves are so unlike. Things with local and temporal natures are both *present in* the times and places in which they are said to exist, and are held together by those times and places. But in the case of the Supreme Being only the first meaning is intended; it is present, but it is not upheld by anything. So, he says, if the usage of language permitted, it would seem to be more appropriate to say that the Supreme Being is "*with*" all places and times, rather than "*in*" a time or place. For saying that something is *in* another thing implies more strongly that it is held together than does saying that it is *with* that thing.

Summarizing his analysis at the end of *Monologion* XXII, Anselm writes:

> *In no place or time, then, is this Being properly said to exist, since it is upheld by no other at all. And yet it may be said, in its own certain sense, to exist in every place or time, since whatever exists is sustained by its presence, lest it lapse into nothingness. It is in every place and time because it is absent from none; and it is in none, because it has no place or time, and has not taken to itself distinctions of place or time, neither here nor there, nor anywhere, nor then, nor now, nor at any time, nor does it exist in terms of this fleeting present, in which we live, nor has it existed, nor will it exist, in terms of past or future, since these are restricted to things delimited and mutable, which it is not.*[8]

8 The Latin text is: *In omni loco et tempore est, quia nulli abest; et in nullo est, quia nullum locum aut tempus habet. Nec in se recipit distinctiones locorum aut temporum, ut hic vel illic vel alicubi, aut nunc vel tunc vel aliquando; nec secundum labile praesens tempus quo utimur est, aut secundum praeteritum vel futurum fuit aut erit, quondiam haec circumscriptorum et mutabilium propria sunt, quod illa non est.*

> *And yet, it can be said of it that, in a certain way, it is present in all finite and mutable things just as if it were circumscribed by the same places, and changes by the same times.*

Although Anselm claims that this suffices to dissolve the contradiction which arose earlier, that claim appears to be at least premature. For he says that this Supreme Nature "is in every place and time because it is absent from none; and it is in none". That is still contradictory, even though he has qualified the first claim as being in every place and time "in a certain way".

4.4 *Reformulating Anselm's Way of Dissolving of the Contradiction*

I submit that Anselm retains that echo of his earlier contradiction in his solution because he wanted to make clear what is true in each of those opposed claims. However, his solution can be expressed in a way which is free of any hint of contradiction.

Anselm had argued earlier in the *Monologion* that the Supreme Being is *per se* [through itself] and that everything else has been made by this Supreme Being from nothing. Because the Supreme Being is the Creator of everything else, the lawlike conditions which impose limitations upon the existence of every created thing are not applicable to their Creator.

Another consequence of maintaining this contrast between the Supreme Being – whom he eventually identifies as God – and everything in space and time is that the 'flow' of time throughout the universe is real. That is implied in many passages, but it is explicit in his concluding that the difference between the Creator and creatures is that the former cannot properly be said to be here or there, or anywhere, or then, or now, or at any time whereas the latter "*are restricted to things delimited and mutable*". When he says that, he is clearly adopting a realist interpretation of time in which everything which is now, truly does have a past, and will probably have a future, and may be properly described in terms of those spatial and temporal adverbs.

Since no laws of place or time prevent the Supreme Nature from being all at once in every place or time, Anselm infers that "it is necessary that it is present all at once as a totality [*simul totam*] in every individual place and time". But Anselm is denying that tensed verbs appropriately describe the Supreme Being, for to say "was" is to refer specifically to the past, and to say "will be" is to refer specifically to the future. Likewise, all the adverbs he listed – "here", "there, "anywhere", "then", "now", "at any time" – share one feature in common with tensed verbs: they all refer to *specific* times and places. Because those spatiotemporal locations are properly used to describe those things which are delimited and mutable, they cannot be used properly to describe their Creator.

So, the Supreme Nature must be described by using verbs which are tenseless. Likewise, the only adverbial phrases which may be used to describe the Supreme Nature must not convey the slightest hint of its having any specific spatial location or any specific temporal duration.

But another consequence of taking creation seriously, as Anselm does, is that everything other than the Creator exists *per aliud* [through another]. Because everything else does not exist necessarily, their very existence is so precarious that they once did not exist at all. Even when they do exist, they all are liable to cease existing – and most, if not all, eventually do.[9] So, not only is the Supreme Nature the Creator of everything else, but it also permeates the entire history of the universe and its vast and expanding spatial extent. In that sense, which he also has carefully restricted so that it does not apply to specific places and times, the startling outcome in *Monologion* XXII of Anselm's reconciliation of his two contradictory conclusions is that:

> *Since an inescapable necessity demands that the Supreme Being be present as a totality in every place and time, and since no characteristic of place and time prevents it from being present as a totality in every place and time, it must be present as a totality all at once in each and every place and time*.

That is the sense in which the Supreme Being is "in" space and time.

So, not only is it *proper* to speak of the Supreme Being as existing "always and everywhere as a totality", but it is also *necessary* that it is always and everywhere as a totality, upholding the existence of the whole universe. The verb "is" in that previous sentence is tenseless, which is why Anselm allows, as he did in the passage quoted at the end of §9.4.3, that the Supreme Being "*may be said, in its own certain sense, to exist in every place or time, since whatever exists is sustained by its presence, lest it lapse into nothingness*".

Anselm concludes accordingly in *Monologion* XXIII that the Supreme Being is better understood as existing everywhere, instead of *in* every place. For, he says, we often quite properly attribute place-words to things which are neither places nor held together by delimited places. For example, when he says that the understanding is *there* in the soul, he is saying that that is *where* rationality is, but a soul is not a place. Likewise, Anselm comments, the Supreme Nature is more aptly said to be everywhere – that it is in all existing things, in this sense – than if it is understood just to be in all places. And in *Monologion* XXIV he

9 I say that "most, if not all" eventually lapse into nothingness because Anselm allows in *Proslogion* XXII that there are some beings which had a beginning, but have no end. I comment on this in §9.4.7.

makes the same points about time: the Supreme Being is better understood as being "always" rather than "at every time". For, since the Supreme Nature is not constrained to being at any particular time, it can *always* be what it is, existing all at once [*simul*] and perfectly whole [*perfecte tota*].

Those reformulations make it clear that Anselm has succeeded in reconciling the two conflicting statements he adduced at the end of *Monologion* XXI. The contradiction which threatened to destroy the very concept of eternity has been dissolved. The Supreme Being is always and everywhere as a totality without being subject to the limitations of existing in defined spaces for a limited duration to which every created thing is subject.

4.5 *Anselm's Account of Eternity in the Proslogion*

That understanding of eternity is what Anselm carries forward into the *Proslogion*. His treatment of the topic is briefer and more assured, for he now knows what to say. By the end of *Proslogion* III he has established not only that God so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist, but also that He has being most greatly of all. That last conclusion enables him to infer in *Proslogion* XIII that:

> *Everything which is to some extent enclosed by space or by time is less than that which no law of space or time confines* [coercet]. *Therefore, since nothing is greater than You, no place or time contains* [cohibet] *You, but You are everywhere and always. Since this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal.*

All the clauses in this passage echo what Anselm had already written in the *Monologion*, except for the word "*cohibet*". In particular, it is striking that he repeats the claim that God is everywhere and always.

Anselm returns to the topic of God's eternity after arguing in *Proslogion* XVIII that there are no parts in God. He begins *Proslogion* XIX by raising the issue he had already confronted in the *Monologion*:

> *But if, through Your eternity, You have been, and are, and will have been, and to have been is not to be in the future, and to be is not to have been or to be in the future, in what way is Your eternity always a totality*?

That is the question Anselm raised in the *Monologion* concerning the Supreme Being, but since he has already identified the God whom he is addressing as having being most greatly, he is addressing the same issues to God. He answers

that question by asking a different rhetorical question which suggests two ways of answering it:[10]

> *Can it be that nothing of Your eternity passes away so that now it is not, nor will something be in the future as if it as yet is not? Therefore, You have not been yesterday, nor will You be tomorrow, but yesterday, today, and tomorrow You are. No rather, You are neither yesterday, nor today, nor tomorrow, but in an unqualified sense* [simpliciter] *You* are*, out of all time* [es extra omne tempus].

4.6 *Interpreting Eternity as Strictly Timeless*

It is notable that those last two contradictory statements are reminiscent of the contradiction Anselm himself generated in *Monologion* XX. But whereas he had concluded there that it is both necessary and impossible that the Supreme Nature is everywhere and always, the conflict here is between a way of existing which has a past, a present, and a future, and a way of existing to which such descriptions are inapplicable. In *Proslogion* III Anselm had already proven that the God whom he is addressing "has being most greatly". So, from that conclusion, he is inferring here that the solution he worked out in *Monologion* XXII as true of the Supreme Nature is true of God. It is inappropriate to describe God as having a past, and a future, for that implies that He is extended in time. The existence of God can only be described using verb "*es*" tenselessly, as Anselm had already argued in *Monologion* XXII.

When Anselm's clause, "in an unqualified sense You *are*, out of all time", is interpreted that way, his claim is compatible with what he wrote in *Proslogion* XIII: that "You are everywhere and always". It cannot be maintained that Anselm is retracting that claim in *Proslogion* XIX, for, as noted above in §9.2, he asserts in *Reply* I that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought "*in no way is it not as a totality somewhere and at some time, but it is always and everywhere as a totality*". Since Anselm has already identified something-than-which-a-

10 Sigbjorn Sonnesyn has pointed out to me how important it is to translate this passage in a way which brings out, rather than conceals, the straining syntax of Anselm's Latin. He wrote to me:

> Anselm is here going from the temporal tenses to only using the present, and then from a temporal present to a present outside of time. In other words, he is starting from the language we use, and ending with a mode of expression that is strikingly odd because it is removed from the temporal framework of normal language. The progress here is grammatical rather than argumentative, refining language until he reaches a mode of expression that does not actively mislead.

The translation above of this passage is based upon a translation of the whole paragraph which Sonnesyn kindly provided at my request.

greater-cannot-be-thought in *Proslogion* III with God, that implies that God is always and everywhere as a totality. Furthermore, as noted in §9.3 above, Anselm argues in *Reply* IV that "All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme", since that alone cannot be thought not to exist which thinking finds "*always and everywhere as a totality*". Since Anselm has proven in *Proslogion* III that God has being more greatly than everything else, he has already identified God as "*that which is supreme*".

Some commentators, however, interpret the sentence "In an unqualified sense You *are* out of all time" as asserting that God is timeless in a much stronger sense than simply existing in a way which can only be described tenselessly. For example, in a paper published in 2007, Katherin Rogers introduces her exegesis of Anselm's conception of time and eternity by writing:

> Anselm is, to my knowledge, the first philosopher to spell out clearly the conclusion that if God is timeless, then the entire space-time universe must be immediately present to Him, with all places and all times equally real. This is the essentially tenseless view of time. Past, present and future are not absolute, rather they are relative to a given temporal perceiver at a given time.[11]

In a paper published a year earlier Rogers had argued that:

> Anselm consistently describes things and events that exist in time as always there and present to God. It is not that propositions about them are known by God or that God knows them through knowing what He Himself intends to do. The things and events themselves exist in divine eternity.[12]

Declaring Anselm's position "unambiguous", she says that she will cite a few proof texts.[13] But instead of doing so, she asserts that "Anselm, as the beginning of the famous *Proslogion* argument shows, takes it as non-negotiable that God is 'that than which a greater cannot be conceived'".[14] We have seen, however, that that is a misreading of the text; Anselm *deduces* that God alone is something

11 Katherin Rogers, 'Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God', *Faith and Philosophy* 24:1 (2007), p. 3.

12 Katherin Rogers, 'Anselm on Eternity as the Fifth Dimension', *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 3:2 (2006), pp. 1–8, at p. 7.

13 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 4.

14 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 5.

than which a greater cannot be thought in Stage Three of his proof, and identifies God as "that than which a greater cannot be thought" in *Proslogion* IV.

She then asserts that in analysing the relationship of God to creation, and eternity to time, the starting point is the perfection of God, and asserts that, since perfection seems to entail timelessness, "Anselm takes it that the tenseless view of time follows from the divine perfection of eternity, and so we know that time is tenseless".[15] This is an extraordinary case of jumping to a conclusion, which she later elaborates on the ground that the Anselmian conception of eternity entails four-dimensionalism.

Only after attributing this inference to Anselm does she ask whether Anselm really does insist that God is timeless, and cites some of the sentences from *Monologion* XXI reviewed in §9.4.2 above as supporting a positive answer.[16] On that basis, she claims that, for Anselm, that God exists eternally means that He exists timelessly and that consequently, for Him, time is simply the fourth dimension of space. She does not address any of the texts where Anselm argues that the Supreme Nature (in the *Monologion*) and God (in the *Proslogion*) exist always and everywhere as a totality.

It is one thing to argue, as Anselm does, that God's existence is tenseless; it is another to infer that, consequently, time is also essentially tenseless. She takes the opposite of her view to be 'presentism' which she calls "the common-sense view of time". She describes "presentism" as asserting that

> All that exists is the present, and time is essentially tensed. That is, the past does not exist, since it is no longer present, although it may be "fixed" in that what happened, happened and cannot be undone. The future does not exist since it is not yet present, and it is "open" in that there are alternative possibilities relative to what will happen.[17]

She describes the Anselmian understanding of things as: "This is how time appears, but appearances are deceiving" and claims that "What we temporal perceivers call present and past and future are relative to a given perceiver at a given point in time".

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15 This claim appears on p.5 of 'Anselmian Eternalism', but is elaborated in a long section beginning on p. 9.

16 I find it significant that on page 24 of 'Anselmian Eternalism' she cites *Monologion* XX as the source of these sentences, although they actually occur in *Monologion* XXI. As has been shown in §9.4.1 above, in *Monologion* XX Anselm argues that it is necessary that the Supreme Nature exists always and everywhere, an equally significant passage of which she takes no account.

17 Rogers, 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 7.

That last comment is correct, but that relativity does not imply that our experience of phenomena as moving through time is deceptive. On the contrary, the movements we perceive are real, and all our actions are directed towards goals which are genuinely in the future. If our sense of the passage of time is 'deceptive', we could not act – not because the future is somehow already determined by what is present – but because the very fact that we perform actions every day presupposes that we are able to affect what happens in the future. The reason why what happened in the past cannot be undone is simply because it is *true* that what happened, happened; those truths cannot be made false. But since we humans have been endowed with freedom of choice, in the perspective of us here now, the future is still somewhat indeterminate.

Rogers admits that "the tenseless view is very, very strange". She tries to explain that away this strangeness by commenting, "but strange is not logically or metaphysically impossible", noting that "the universe of contemporary physics is mind-bogglingly bizarre" as supporting her interpretation of time as the fourth dimension of space.[18] Rogers is not alone in maintaining that interpretation of time; many physicists and philosophers have interpreted the equations of relativity theory as demonstrating that the universe is a four-dimensional 'block' ordered in terms of the relations of "earlier than" and "later than" – in which nothing becomes because *everything* tenselessly "is".

However, to interpret time as a fourth dimension of space is 'strange' precisely because it is physically and logically impossible. Ever since Einstein introduced his Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, space and time have been fused as spacetime. Distant events which are simultaneous from one perspective are not from another. Einstein's theory provided the equations which transform the calculations made in one frame of reference into those which hold in another. That implied that all locations in space-time are perspectival.

However, in 1908 Hermann Minkowski combined a three-dimensional Euclidean space with Einstein's special relativity to produce a four-dimensional manifold where the spacetime interval between any two events is independent of the inertial frames of reference in which they are recorded. But that is just a mathematical model, not a plausible metaphysical account of reality. It is, of course, possible to *represent* events which occur at different times as simply before and after, but such representations of time necessarily *abstract* from the actual movements which occur over time. The transformation of the temporal order into a set of spatial relations is a product of the representation, not of time itself. Constructing such representations is a useful heuristic in physics,

18 Rogers, 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 13.

but to allege that those representations are what time actually is, is to mistake a map of a journey for the journey itself.

There is an irreducible asymmetry between the three spatial dimensions and time. All movements in any spatial direction are reversible, but the speed of light in a vacuum sets a finite and absolute limit to the speed of any movement; it is not possible to send anything back in time. Even in Minkowski's model, the treatment of the temporal dimension is different from the treatment of the three spatial dimensions. Indeed, the temporal dimension must be different from the three spatial dimensions, for movements in time are not reversible, as spatial movements are. That our experience of temporal reality is an illusion is itself simply incredible.

We saw in Chapter 4 that modern cosmology is based on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, published in 1915, and has been confirmed by many astronomical observations. It implies a *radical relationism*. As the theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli has pointed out, in General Relativity there is no independent 'background' framework of spacetime within which three-dimensional objects could be located, nor do such objects have any non-relative properties. Since on his interpretation there is no absolute viewpoint from which a system can be observed, he infers that:

> In quantum mechanics different observers may give different accounts of the same sequence of events.[19]

Spatiotemporal locations can be distinguished only relative to other spatiotemporal locations. Every physical object can be taken as defining a perspective, to which all values of physical quantities can be referred. Rovelli and Frederico Laudisa infer from this that there is "no God's eye point of view".[20] Yet Rogers's interpretation requires that God has a privileged perspective from which the universe as a whole can be viewed as it really is. That interpretation is indeed inconsistent with General Relativity.

Howbeit, I submit that the understanding of time and eternity which Anselm so painstakingly worked out is compatible with Rovelli's radically relational interpretation of General Relativity. For to read Anselm's texts as advocating that temporal objects and events exist four-dimensionally as a series of

19 Carlo Rovelli, 'Relational Quantum Mechanics', *International Journal of Theoretical Physics*, 1996, pp. 1637–78, Revised 2008.

20 Federico Laudisa and Carlo Rovelli: 'Relational Quantum Mechanics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/qm-relational.

'spacetime slices' is a serious misrepresentation. The arguments which were reviewed in §9.4.1 to §9.4.5 presuppose that all things which are limited in space and time are extended both spatially and temporally. All his arguments *contrast* God's tenseless existence with the spatiality and temporality of all other things. They would make no sense if time were also tenseless.

It is significant that Rogers does not even mention how Anselm reconciles in *Monologion* XXII the contradiction between the conclusions of *Monologion* XX and XXI, nor his reiteration in *Monologion* XXII that "*the Supreme Being … must be present as a totality all at once in each and every place and time*", nor his inference in *Proslogion* XIII that "*You are everywhere and always*" because "*You alone are unlimited*".

Rogers finds the clearest statement of four-dimensionalism in Anselm's writings in *De Concordia*, which he wrote thirty years after the *Proslogion*. She quotes the following passage from Book 1, chapter 5:

> *If indeed just as the present time upholds* [continet] *every place, and that which is in whatsoever place, so too all time is confined* [clauditur] *all at once by the eternal present, and that which is in whatsoever time…. For he has his own eternity all at once* [simul], *in which are all those things that exist together* [simul] *in one place or one time, as well as all those which exist in diverse places or times*.[21]

Rogers glosses this passage as saying: "Time is a fourth dimension containing all of space, and divine eternity is a sort of fifth dimension containing all time and space".[22] Yet Anselm has written a few lines above:

> *For although in eternity it is not the case that something was or will be, but only it is, nonetheless – and without any inconsistency – in time something was or will be*.[23]

That can only be read as saying whatever is in time has a past and a future, whereas, in contrast, God has his own distinctive way of simply being, which can only be described as tenseless.

It is significant that in this passage Anselm uses the same verbs "*continet*" and "*clauditur*" as he did in the *Monologion* more than thirty years earlier.

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21 What follows is my translation of the passage she quotes. Rogers, translates *continet* as "contains", and *clauditur* as "enclosed". 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 6.

22 Rogers, 'Anselmian Eternalism', p. 6.

23 Williams' translation.

Clearly, his accounts of time and eternity have not fundamentally changed. For this passage can be interpreted as consistent with the position he arrives at in *Monologion* XXII and XXIII. It is all too easy to read the *De Concordia* passage as asserting that God has only one present moment in which He perceives all temporal events, so the whole of time must be laid out simultaneously so that God can perceive them all in one view. But to understand the eternal present that way is to import a tensed description of the present into Anselm's account of eternity. That is inconsistent. Anselm has made it quite clear that God is tenselessly everywhere and always as a totality, but that the eternal present is *tenseless*. So, God can perceive every event which happens in his own distinctively tenseless present, which is, from our perspective, the same everywhere and always.

4.7 *Alternative Interpretations of Eternity*

Some commentators do not agree that Anselm maintains that God exists timelessly. For example, John Marenbon recognizes that Anselm poses the contradiction articulated at the end of §9.4.3. He says,

> Anselm's solution is to say that God exists in time (or, better he thinks, "with time") but is not bounded or measured by it, and so He has no temporal parts.[24]

But then, quoting the passage in *Proslogion* XIX which was discussed in §9.4.5, Marenbon asks:

> Does he [i.e., Anselm] now, therefore, abandon the view he had put forward a few pages before and in the *Monologion* and opt for a timeless God? The next lines make it clear that he does not. God is not in time (nor in place); rather, they are in him, "For nothing contains you, but you contain all things". If God were timeless, then time would simply have nothing to do with him. But Anselm makes God's eternity closely related to time, although the relationship is the converse of that between a temporal being and time, one of containing rather than being contained.[25]

Marenbon is yet another commentator who translates "*continet*" as "contains". But, setting that aside, Marenbon has gone too far in rejecting any sense in which eternity, according to Anselm, is timeless. It is altogether too quick to

24 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', p. 185.
25 Marenbon, 'Anselm's *Proslogion*', pp. 186–7.

say that "If God were timeless, then time would simply have nothing to do with him". I have argued that Anselm's asserting that God "*in an unqualified sense You* are*, out of all time*" means that no tenses can be used to describe God's way of existing – just that, but nothing more – and I will argue in §13.6 that things described tenselessly can nevertheless be located in places and times.

Someone who recognizes that Anselm uses the verb "*esse*" both as tensed and as non-tensed is Taneli Kukkonen. Commenting on the passage quoted above from *De Concordia*, he contrasts the view of time as a series of events ordered in terms of "before" and "after" standardly called the "B-series" nowadays – with the view that time is ordered in terms of past, present and future – standardly called the "A-series". He comments that:

> Remarkably, neither Augustine nor Anselm seem to regard such a B-series view of divine knowledge as being incompatible with absolute passage in the life of generated creatures, and hence, a tensed or A-series manner of relating facts about created existence.[26]

His assessment is that:

> What Augustine's and Anselm's mix of eternalist and presentist, tenseless and tensed language tells is that medieval philosophers saw no need to choose sides in such a clear-cut manner. This mirrors Visser and Williams's (2009, 99–105) finding that neither one of the contemporary categories of endurance and perdurance adequately captures Anselm's metaphysical intuitions. Nor will it do to label Anselm a four-dimensionalist, as Rogers (2007) has done, without taking into account the way Anselm occasionally resorts to presentist language. If there is a tension here, as seems undeniable, it may yet prove fertile philosophically. Then again, it may not: whatever the case may be, the way to find out is to work through the implications of the actual medieval texts.[27]

In the light of the examination above of what Anselm has written on the topics of time and eternity in the *Monologion*, in the *Proslogion*, and in *De Concordia*, it is clear that Anselm does not "resort occasionally" to using tensed verbs, and related adverbial phrases, to describe created existence. Anselm's use of those locutions is consistent and systematic. His use of the verb *esse* tenselessly

26 Taneli Kukkonen, 'Eternity' in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Marenbon, pp. 525–46, at p. 529.

27 Kukkonen 'Eternity', p. 529.

when describing God's way of existing is also systematic and consistent with his describing God as always and everywhere.

I find Anselm's conception of eternity to be extraordinarily rich and subtle. Unlike the interpretation of space and time which interprets the universe as a four-dimensional 'block', Anselm's position is compatible with the General Theory of Relativity which underpins modern cosmology. Of course, Anselm could not have had an inkling of that modern theory. But his intuitions are so finely honed that he has revised Boethius' conception of eternity quite radically. For his interpretation of eternity does not require God to have an absolute and privileged viewpoint 'outside' time from which to survey the universe as a whole. If God is always and everywhere as a totality, He is able to view the whole universe from every perspective, thus respecting the radically relational character of spacetime, and since He is an unchanging totality, all those viewpoints are equivalent. That is the sense they are *simul*.

Comprehending how he holds together the tenseless character of God's way of existing with God's permeating all other things challenges our preunderstandings. So, it is not surprising that many commentators present a one-sided account of Anselm's conception, thereby misrepresenting it. I confess that I too struggled to grasp its complexity. But I now submit that not only is there nothing contradictory in this conception of eternity, but also there is nothing in it which is inconsistent with our current views of how things exist in spacetime. How a tenseless God relates to temporal things will be discussed further in §13.6.

5 Justifying Anselm's Uniqueness Premise

Having ascertained why Anselm holds that God is always and everywhere as a totality, and how that accords with his understanding of time and eternity, we are in a position to return to the consideration of Anselm's premise:

> (3) That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking finds neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality.

For the account of the relationship between time and eternity which Anselm worked out in *Monologion* XXII to XXIV implies that nothing other than the Supreme Being is always and everywhere as a totality. That conclusion follows from Anselm's establishing that the Supreme Being it is not subject to the laws of space and time, but upholds all other things by permeating them all. It is not

possible that there could be more than one being of whom that is true. That suffices to establish the uniqueness implied by his premise (3).

It might be objected that to cite anything from the *Monologion* in support of Anselm's *Reply* IV would beg the question. For in the *Reply* IV argument Anselm needs premise (3) in order to infer that there is a supreme being, but his discussion of eternity in the *Monologion* presupposes that there is just one Supreme Being who is the Creator of everything else. So, any relevant considerations which might be gleaned from the *Monologion* could not be validly cited as justifying his premise (3) because this reasoning would be circular.

Put that way, that objection might seem fair enough if the purpose of this argument were to prove that God exists. But the existence of God as the Supreme Being is not in question in *Reply* IV. Anselm developed this argument as a direct response to Gaunilo's challenge, and he immediately applied the conclusion of his argument to refute Gaunilo's conjecture that he could not think of his own non-existence. Those facts show that Anselm is engaging with what Gaunilo had said. In that context Anselm is entitled to take for granted the existence of God as the supreme being.

Since Gaunilo had expressed his suggestion in terms of "this supreme thing", Anselm is not required to prove in *Reply* IV that there is a 'supreme thing' before he can respond to Gaunilo's suggestion. Although he begins his response by quoting Gaunilo's description, when he comes to draw his conclusion that all things can be thought not to exist, he expresses the one exception more respectfully as "that which is supreme". For having presumed the uniqueness of that which is always and everywhere as a totality, on the basis of what he had worked out in the *Monologion*, he validly infers from (1) and (3) that:

(4) All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme.

For it follows from (4) and Gaunilo's identification of God as 'this supreme thing' that:

(6) It is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.

Even though his debate with Gaunilo presupposes that the Supreme Being exists, and is the Creator of everything else, Anselm has established the truth of (5), so critical for his three-stage proof of the existence of God, independently of *Proslogion* II and III,

6 Identifying That Which Is Eternal

Anselm mentions that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought only once more in *Reply* IV – after he had articulated this argument. Having rebuked Gaunilo for suggesting that he could not think that he does not exist, Anselm launches into a discussion to distinguish two different ways in which what does exist both can and cannot be thought not to exist. We can *think* that something which we know does exist nevertheless does not exist, because we can think the former and know the latter at the same time. And yet, in a different way, we cannot think that it does not exist while we know that it does, because we cannot think that it exists and does not exist at the same time. He concludes from this discussion that:

> *Therefore, if anyone should make this distinction between the two meanings of this statement, he will understand that nothing could be thought not to exist, while it is known not to exist, and that whatever exists, except for that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, even while it is known to exist, could be thought not to exist. In this way, therefore, it is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist, and nevertheless, many things cannot be thought not to exist, whilst they exist.*

In this passage Anselm is clearly identifying that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought with God, as he had proven in *Proslogion* III, and reiterated in *Proslogion* IV.

However, he has already established all that is needed to infer validly that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is "that which is supreme" from this *Reply* IV argument. For it has already been shown on line (33) in Chapter 7 that Anselm was justified in asserting in *Reply* III that:

> (7) If it could be thought that something-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, it could be thought to have beginning or an end, but this is impossible.

From that impossibility, it follows that:

> (8) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought to have beginning or an end

From (8) he infers in *Reply* III that:

(9) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.

When in *Reply* IV Anselm begins his response to Gaunilo's suggestion that it would be better to say that "this supreme thing" could not be *understood* not to exist he uses the referring phrase which Gaunilo had used. However, (9) is the immediately preceding sentence which Anselm had written was the conclusion of the argument in *Reply* III. So, while Anselm is quoting Gaunilo's phrase, "this supreme thing", in the context of the first sentence of *Reply* IV, that phrase would most reasonably be read as referring to "[Something] than which a greater cannot be thought". That is not inappropriate, given what the conclusion of *Reply* III says.

Anselm has already argued in *Reply* I that:

(10) Whatever is composed of parts can be thought not to exist.

So, it follows from (9) and (10), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(11) It cannot be thought that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is composed of parts.

So, it follows from conjoining (8) and (11) that:

(12) It cannot be thought that that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning or an end, or is a conjunction of parts.

So what Anselm simply asserted in *Reply* I has now been justified:

> *In no way does something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought not exist as a totality somewhere and at some time, but it is always and everywhere as a totality*.

From (3) and (12), it follows, by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(13) That alone which is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, for thinking finds that it has neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but finds that it is always and everywhere as a totality.

It then follows from (1) and (13) that:

(14) All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which exists supremely.

That conclusion has been validly deduced entirely from what Anselm has argued in the *Reply*. It therefore is independent of Stage One and Two in the *Proslogion*.

This extension of Anselm's *Reply* IV argument has established that "Whatever is other than that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist". It was all too easy to interpret that conclusion as justifying Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise. But there are two reasons why that would be wrong.

Firstly, the extension of Anselm's *Reply* IV argument stops one step short of inferring that "Whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist". Since Anselm was responding to Gaunilo's objection, he could take it as given that what Gaunilo calls "this supreme thing" exists and is identical to God. But when this argument is interpreted as justifying Anselm's Stage Three premise, whether something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is identical to the God in whom Anselm believes is precisely what Stage Three is designed to prove. It cannot be assumed as given.

Secondly, the argument which entails both (4) and (14) depends upon the premise (3). That premise was justified in §9.4 by Anselm's exploration of the concept of eternity in the *Monologion*. But that analysis of this concept is dependent upon his arguing earlier in the *Monologion* that the Supreme Being exists and is the Creator of everything else. So to invoke the conclusion (14) as justifying his Stage Three premise would be circular and would beg the question.

The fact that Anselm did not take the last step in *Reply* IV confirms that he was not presenting the argument in *Reply* IV in order to justify his Stage Three premise. It remains the case that he never attempted to justify that premise. However, in the following chapter that premise will be justified in another way which does not beg any question.

The fact that Anselm did not take the last step in *Reply* IV confirms that he presents the argument in *Reply* IV, not in order to justify his Stage Three premise, but in order to confirm:

(6) It is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.

For that conclusion is the fundamental truth which underlies the argumentative strategy of building his proof of the existence of God in three distinct stages.

I surmise that the reason why Anselm did not try to justify that premise in *Reply* IV was that he knew it to be true, but could not say so because his knowledge came from what he had proven in the *Proslogion* from the very premise he would have been seeking to justify. That is reasonable, but it leaves his Stage Three premise dependent only upon his belief that the God described in the Nicene Creed is indeed the Creator of everything else.

It remains the case that he never *explicitly* attempted to justify his Stage Three premise, although that premise is implied by (6). However, it will be shown in the next chapter how the premise (1), which asserts the criteria which determine what *can* be thought not to exist, can be used to establish the uniqueness of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in a quite different way. That will then enable Anselm's Stage Three premise to be justified in the strongest possible way.

CHAPTER 10

A Cosmological Reformulation of Stage Three of Anselm's Proof

In Chapter 8 I interpreted the second half of *Proslogion* III as the third stage of Anselm's proof of the existence of God. For he there resumes his prayer and declares to God:

> *And this is You, Lord our God. Therefore, You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.*

In that passage I discerned that those conclusions, when combined with the conclusion of Stage Two, are entailed by two new premises:

(8:9) It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that You are the Creator of all other things.
(8:23) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist

I showed in Chapter 8 how the two conclusions quoted above could be validly deduced as proven truths because the premise (8:9) does not presuppose either that the God whom Anselm is addressing exists or is the Creator, and (8:23) can be discharged in the course of the deduction. However, it remains a concern that Anselm offered no justification of his crucial premise (8:23).

In both *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I had interpreted the cosmological argument Anselm presented in *Reply* IV as justifying Anselm's Stage Three premise, (8:23). But I now recognize that that was quite inappropriate, because the justification of its second premise – which asserts that only one thing could not be thought not to exist – presupposes that the Supreme Being exists and is the Creator of everything else.

Since the premise (8:23) is so crucial to Anselm's deduction of the two conclusions quoted above, in this chapter I shall demonstrate that only one thing could be something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in a way which does not rely on those presuppositions. I shall then propose a Constructive Dilemma which will bring together two Stage Three arguments – the deduction of the premise (8:23) from the first clause of the Nicene Creed, and the argument just foreshadowed – under an over-arching premise. This twofold

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argument will justify Anselm's Stage Two premise (8:23) in the strongest possible way. That will enable the two conclusions quoted to be proven in a way which is not vulnerable to any of the standard objections to Anselm's proof of the existence of God.

1 Reviewing the Cosmological Reformulation of Stages One and Two

At the outset, I must forewarn readers that the argument I am about to present is quite long; you might find yourselves wondering whether it will ever reach its conclusions. I can only say that the issue of God's existence is so significant that it is essential that no short-cuts are taken. It is not reasonable to expect that such a momentous issue could be settled in just a few short lines.

The first step in constructing a reformulated Stage Three argument is to review what has been established in Stages One and Two. In Chapter 4 Anselm's Stage One was reformulated as requiring only four premises:

(1) The factual premise: Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.
(2) The quasi-definition of having a beginning: Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything has a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but does not exist at any time before some previous time.
(3) Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x,* and some positive, primitive, predicate *F,* which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, and is true of *x* but not of *y*.
(4) The premise implicit in Anselm's explanation of how to conceive something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought: *Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.

From those four premises it was deduced in §4.8 that:

(4:34) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.

Then in §4.9 it was deduced from those same premises that:

(4:53) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

From both (4:34) and (4:53) it follows that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists. So the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's Stage One proves his Stage One conclusion in an even stronger and less contentious form than the original.

It has been shown in Chapter 5 that those same four premises justify the premises of the three arguments which Anselm presented in *Reply* I: the first based on existing with a beginning: and the others which together form a constructive dilemma based on existing contingently. Thus, it was demonstrated on cosmological grounds that it is false to claim that no valid argument can ever entail the existence of something from its being merely thought to exist.

Then in Chapter 6 it was demonstrated in §6.2 that (4:53) entails Anselm's Stage Two premise, and from that premise it was deduced on line (41) in §6.4 that:

(5) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

That proposition (5) is Anselm's Stage Two conclusion. It is entailed by the same premises – (1) to (4) – which sufficed to prove the conclusions in the two versions of the cosmological reformulation of Stage One.

2 Proving That Something Exists Supremely

As I have repeatedly emphasized, there is nothing in either Stages One and Two of Anselm's proof in the *Proslogion*, or in Stages One and Two of our cosmological reformulation of them, which entails that only one thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought. Although Anselm began *Proslogion* II by declaring his belief that God is something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought, throughout both Stages One and Two he has been scrupulous *not* to presume that only one thing of such a nature exists.

In both *Proslogion* II and III Anselm does introduce the singular term "*that* -than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought", but he introduces that term merely as an exemplar of the indefinite description "*something* than which a greater cannot be thought". In both Stages One and Two he is careful to generalize that singular term back to that indefinite description before he infers his conclusions. He must do that if he is to claim that the conclusions he has deduced are validly entailed by a proposition the subject of which is an *indefinite* description. So, how many things than which a greater cannot be thought exist remains indeterminate at the end of Stage Two.

As I pondered whether there was some way to establish the uniqueness of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, other than appealing to

Anselm's analysis of the concept of eternity as in Chapter 9, I remembered the argument which Anselm presents in *Proslogion* XV. In typical fashion, he begins that argument by announcing the conclusion which he is about to deduce:

> *Therefore, Lord, not only are You than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are greater than could be thought.*

His argument for that conclusions is quite brief:

> *Since it can be thought that there is something of this sort* [huiusmodi], *if You are not this very thing, it is possible to think of something greater than You, which cannot happen.*

Since it is *not possible* to think that something is greater than God – who has been shown in *Proslogion* II–IV to be "That than which a greater cannot be thought" – this argument validly entails that "You are something greater than could be thought".

Of course, since we are here in the process of trying to justify Anselm's Stage Three premise, it is not proper to invoke that identity statement here. Nevertheless, taking a cue from that argument, I now propose an argument modelled upon it with a similar, although not so simple, structure. For it is one of Anselm's favourite argumentative ploys to propose that some proposition about something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought, and then deduce that that thought is true. However, as was established in Chapter 7, that ploy is valid only in the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

If it *can be thought* that *only one* existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, that thing could be thought to exist supremely. Then, mimicking the premise in Anselm's *Proslogion* XV argument, if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not that very thing, then it would be possible to think of something greater than it – which cannot happen. Thus, this argument would entail that that thought is true: something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would exist supremely. The argument which follows has the same structure as the one in *Proslogion* XV. Let me now articulate this reasoning, step by step.

Since (5), the conclusion of Stage Two, has already been established both in *Proslogion* III and in our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's Stage Two in Chapter 6, it has been establidshed that there does exist at least one thing which could not be thought not to exist. If Anselm premise (8:23) is to be justified, it cannot be presupposed that a Supreme Being exists and is the

Creator of everything else, as was presupposed in the validation of Anselm's *Reply* IV argument in Chapter 9. It has already been proven in §8.6 that only one such thing exists. But because that conclusion was deduced from the very premise which we are setting out to justify, it cannot be invoked here. So it remains to be determined whether that there could be more than one such thing.

To begin to answer that question, it is significant that the following is a conceptual truth:

(6) If only one existing thing were something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it would exist supremely.

The proposition (6) is a conceptual truth because there could not be anything greater than something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and if only one such thing exists, it would be the only thing which exists so greatly. Therefore, it would exist supremely because it would exist more greatly than everything else. But so far, nothing has been said so far which determines whether that description is true of only one thing, or more than one.

Applying Anselm's rule for Distributing Conceivability to (6), it follows that:

(7) If it can be thought that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it exists supremely.

Conjoining (5) and (7) yields:

(8) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and if it can be thought that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it exists supremely.

It is necessary to conjoin (5) with (7) because (7) says only that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *can be thought* to exist supremely, provided it can be thought that only one such thing exists. But if it is to exist supremely, it must exist. Its existence is ensured by conjoining (5) and (7).

Now while (8) does not rule out the possibility that there is more than one thing which is so great that a greater cannot be thought, neither does it rule out the alternative possibility that there is only one thing which is so described. It leaves both possibilities open. Consequently, given what has been established so far, it is a logical truth that:

(9) It is possible that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

While (9) records the fact that nothing which has been established so far rules out the *possibility* that there is the only thing which could not be thought not to exist, it does not imply that that possibility is actual, unlike (9:3) in Anselm's *Reply* IV argument. Nevertheless, the fact that it could be proven in §8.6 that only one such thing exists shows that it is at least *possible* that only one such thing exists, as (9) says. What can be said here is that it follows from (9), by Anselm's Conceivability rule, that:

(10) It can be thought that only one existing thing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Therefore, it follows from (8) and (10) by *modus ponens*, that:

(11) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and it can be thought that it exists supremely.

Generalizing the subject of (11), it follows from its second clause that:

(12) It can be thought that *something* exists supremely.

I have deduced (12) here because it will have a role to play in the following section.

As I have pointed out previously, in order to deduce anything from a proposition with an indefinite description as its subject, it is necessary to assume a proposition with the same predicate, but with a singular term which is an exemplar of that indefinite description as its subject. Then any conclusion which does not mention that singular term can be reaffirmed as entailed by the original proposition provided certain conditions are satisfied. Since the subject term in (11) is an *indefinite* description, in order to deduce any conclusions from (11), that procedure has to be followed. Accordingly, let us assign the name "*a*" to some arbitrarily selected exemplar of the subject of (11) and assume that:

(13) *a* is something than which a greater cannot be thought and it so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and it can be thought that it exists supremely.

To determine whether it is possible that there is more than one thing which is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, let us suppose that something else, which I will call "*b*", is also something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. That is, let us assume that:

(14) There exists another thing, which is not identical to *a*, but which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, *b*.

It now follows from the assumptions (13) and (14) that:

(15) There are two things, *a* and *b*, both of which are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Now, the word "supreme" implies uniqueness. To exist supremely is to be the *only* thing which exists *more greatly* than anything else, including the whole universe; it is to be *uniquely* great. That is why Anselm very properly referred to "*that* which exists supremely" in *Reply* IV. In the political domain, no 'supreme ruler' shares that exalted position with anyone else. And in the legal domain, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal from *all* other courts. Only what is uniquely great is supreme. So, it is a conceptual truth that:

(16) If there is more than one thing which is something than which a greater cannot be thought, it is not possible that any of them exists supremely.

It follows from (15) and (16), by *modus ponens*, that:

(17) It is not possible that either *a* or *b* exists supremely.

To be quite clear, given the assumptions (13) and (14), both *a* and *b* exist *maximally*, because nothing exists which is greater than them. But strictly speaking, because there are two of them sharing the same exalted ontological status, neither of them exists *supremely*. Indeed, according to this scenario in which it is assumed that both *a* and *b* are such that a greater cannot be thought, (16) ensures that *nothing* exists supremely, even though (12) says that it can be thought that something exists supremely. Conjoining (12) and (17) yields:

(18) It can be thought that something exists supremely, but it is not possible that either *a* or *b* exists supremely.

It was recalled above that in *Proslogion* XV Anselm argues that:

> *Since it can be thought that there is something of this sort, if You are not this very thing, it is possible to think of something greater than You – which cannot happen.*

To adapt what Anselm said in *Proslogion* XV to the present case:

> Since it can be thought that something exists supremely, if it is not possible that either *a* or *b* exists supremely, it is possible to think of something greater than something than which a greater cannot be thought, which cannot happen.

To deduce that impossibility, it is a conceptual truth that:

(19) To exist supremely is to exist most greatly of all.

It follows (18) and (19), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(20) It can be thought that something is greater than both *a* and *b*.

To echo what Anselm says in *Proslogion* XV, "which cannot happen". For it is a logical truth that:

(21) It is not possible that something can be thought to be greater than something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Now, (20) has been deduced from the premises which entail (5) – namely, (1), (2), (3), and (4) – and the two assumptions (13) and (14). It was the assumption (14) which introduced the second thing, *b*, not identical to *a*, which is also supposed to be something than which a greater cannot be thought. So, given the assumption (13), it follows from (14) and (20), by Conditional Proof, that:

(22) If there is another thing, which is not identical to *a*, but which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, *b*, then it can be thought that something is greater than both *a* and *b*.

Therefore, it follows from (21) and (22), by *modus tollens*, that:

(23) It is not possible that there is another thing, not identical to *a*, which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely *b*.

The deduction of (23) establishes that the conditions required for Anselm's *indefinite* description to be transformed into a Russellian *definite* description have now been satisfied. For it has been assumed in (13) that *a* is something than which a greater cannot be thought and that it exists, and (23) has established that *a* is the *only* thing which is something than which a greater cannot be thought. So, it follows from the assumption (13) and (23), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(24) It is necessary that only one existing thing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Since (24) establishes that *a* is *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, it is no longer necessary to refer to *a*.

That conclusion has been deduced from the assumption (13) and the conceptual truth (6). For the other assumption (14) has been discharged by being transposed into the antecedent of (22) and then negated. But (24) is still dependent upon the assumption (13), which introduced *a*. However, since (24) does not mention *a*, nor is it dependent upon any other premise which mentions *a*, (24) may be reaffirmed as a conclusion no longer dependent upon (13), but upon (11). That is, (11) entails that:

(25) It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

While (25) says the same as (24), it is now entailed by (11), instead of by the assumption (13). Now, (11) was derived from (8) and (10), and (8) was derived by conjoining (5), the conclusion of Stage Two, with (7), which has been deduced from the conceptual truth (6). As for (10), it was deduced from the logical truth (9). So, (25) is dependent only upon the premises which entailed (5), namely the premises of the cosmological reformulation of Stages One and Two: (1), (2), (3), and (4).

The first step in this argument was to introduce the conceptual truth:

(6) If only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it would exist supremely.

It was noted when (6) was introduced that it is a conceptual truth because, if there was only one such thing, nothing else could be thought to be as great. Therefore, it follows from (6) and (25), by *modus ponens*, that:

(26) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely.

Deducing (26) has established, without any appeal to theological considerations, that it is necessary that the only existing thing which exists supremely is *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Some readers might object to my saying that (26) has been established without any appeal to theological considerations because, they might say, the concept of a supreme being is a *theological* concept. Admittedly, we saw in §3.2 that Anselm's descriptive phrase "something than which a greater cannot be thought" is his minimal formulation of a conception of a god which transcends all cultures and religions. But the concept of existing supremely was introduced into this argument by the conceptual truth (6), based purely on the meaning of that phrase. Nothing which has been established thus far in this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof establishes that that phrase refers to any god.

Since (25) has now been proven, Anselm's Stage Two conclusion, which was recalled on line (5), can be modified. For it follows from (5) and (25), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(27) It is necessary that the only thing which is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

3 Deducing an Analogue of Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise

Given that (27) has been proven, it is now possible to justify Anselm's problematic claim that only one thing could not be thought not to exist, without invoking his analysis in the *Monologion* of what it means to assert that the Supreme Nature exists eternally.

Now, both in Anselm's original Stage Two and on line (38) in Stage Two of our cosmological reformulation of his proof in Chapter 6 it was proven that:

(28) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.

I have been calling that proposition "the interim conclusion" of Stage Two. As was seen in §8.6, (28) is equivalent to:

(29) It is not possible that anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

The contrapositive of the impossible proposition, "Anything-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist", is equivalent to that impossible proposition. So,(29) is equivalent to:

(30) It is not possible that anything which cannot be thought not to exist is not such that a greater cannot be thought.

But (30), in turn, is equivalent to:

(31) It is necessary that whatever cannot be thought not to exist is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

But it has been deduced on line (27) that "It is necessary that the only thing which is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it cannot not be thought not to exist". Therefore, it follows from (27) and (31), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(32) It is necessary that *only* that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.

Proving (32) has proven that it is uniquely true of that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought that it could not be thought not to exist. That uniqueness claim was made by Anselm when he asserted his problematic premise (9:3) in *Reply* IV. That uniqueness claim has now been proven without invoking his analysis of eternity in the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. Since it is dependent only upon the premises (1), (2), (3) and (4), it is not dependent upon any theological proposition. (32) is equivalent to:

(33) It is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

That only one thing could not be thought not to exist was not implied by the conceptual truth (6), but (33) has now been deduced from it.

(33) is an analogue of Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise. It has now been validly deduced on the purely cosmological grounds established by the premises (1) and (2). It has been established independently of the deduction of Anselm's Stage Three premise in the first, theological leg of the dilemma in §6 below. Only one more step is required to justify his Stage Three premise in

this second leg of the dilemma: establishing the identity of that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and God the Father Almighty.

4 Validating Anselm's Cosmological Argument in *Reply* IV

It is now possible to validate the cosmological argument which Anselm presented in *Reply* IV without invoking his analysis of eternity. It will be recalled that he asserted in *Reply* IV, on the basis of the criteria he identified in *Reply* I, that:

(9:1) *All those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end or are a conjunction of parts – as I have already said, whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality – could be thought not to exist.*

In §9.3 it was shown that (9:1) is equivalent to:

(9:2) Whatever cannot be thought not to exist, and only they, is something which does not have a beginning or an end, nor is a conjunction of parts, but is something which is always and everywhere as a totality.

In §9.6 it was shown that:

(9.12) It cannot be thought that that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a beginning or an end, or is a conjunction of parts.

So, it follows from (32) and (9:12), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(9:13) It is necessary that thinking finds in something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought alone neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but finds that it is always and everywhere as a totality.

In *Reply* IV Anselm has asserted, without offering any justification or explanation, that:

(9:3) *That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking finds neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality.*

For that reason, I found this premise problematic, but was able to justify it in §9.4 on the basis of Anselm's analysis of eternity in the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. That analysis presupposed that the Supreme Nature exists and is the Creator of all other things. But now (9:13) has been justified by deducing it from (32). So, it may now be deduced, on quite unproblematic grounds, from (9:1) and (9:13) that (9:14) is necessarily true. That is:

(9:14*) It is necessary that all things can be thought not to exist, apart from that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which exists supremely.

That conclusion has now been justified since it is equivalent to (33) which says that "It is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist". Thus, (9:14*) has been proven without being deduced from Anselm's problematic premise (9:3), nor is his analysis of the concept of eternity required to justify that premise. Since (32) is entailed by the premises (1), (2), (3), (4), which entail the conclusions of both Stages One and Two of our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, so is (9:14*).

5 Introducing a Dilemma to Justify Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise

None of the conclusions deduced above say anything about God. But it was shown in §8.3 that the first clause of the Nicene Creed entails (8.22): That "Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist". Anselm expressed that consequence as (8:23): "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist". And it is a fact – which has been established independently of the belief that the universe has been created by the God described in that creed – that every observable thing which exists for some time in the universe does not exist at other times. Since those two observations are compatible, I am now proposing to bring them together under a single over-arching premise in the form of argument known as a Constructive Dilemma.

The first 'leg' of this dilemma will assume that "The triune God described in the Nicene Creed exists", while the second will assume that that is false. The deduction of Anselm's Stage Three premise which was articulated in Chapter 8 will be replicated as entailed by that first assumption. In the first 'leg' of this dilemma it will be demonstrated how (8:22), from which Anselm inferred his premise (8:23), is entailed by the assumption that the triune God described in the Nicene Creed exists. In the second, negative 'leg' of this dilemma it will

be demonstrated that since it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, the assumption that "It is false that the triune God described in the Nicene Creed exists" is itself necessarily false. Once that inconsistency is removed, (8:22) can be validly deduced for a second time.

Because the second 'leg' of the dilemma I am about to present denies that the God described in the Nicene Creed exists, it differs from Anselm's own Stage Three argument in that it will have to be presented in third-person discourse. But that will not generate any problems, for it was shown in §8.4 that:

> (34) The God whom Anselm is addressing as "You, Lord our God" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

Some sceptical readers might indeed welcome the fact that this dilemma will not be presented in second-person discourse. For anyone who is suspicious of any attempt to prove that God exists will most likely object to Anselm's presenting his Stage Three argument as addressed to God, because his use of the pronoun "You" presupposes that his addressee exists. So, he could be accused of begging the question. Presenting this argument in third-person discourse will have the additional benefit of allaying any such suspicions.

Constructing such a dilemma is faithful to Anselm's reasoning, for in the *Reply* he presents two different examples of that form of argument. The first example is in *Reply* I where, after presenting the argument examined in §5.1, Anselm presents the two linked arguments reported in §5.3 with contrary assumptions. I interpreted these two arguments as alternative legs of a constructive dilemma with an implicit over-arching premise: "*Either* something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, *or* it does not", which is an instance of the logical Law of Excluded Middle. Like the first argument in *Reply* I, it demonstrates that, in the unique case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, "If it can be thought, it is unable not to exist".

Likewise, we saw in §7.7 that Anselm responded in *Reply* III to Gaunilo's parody of his Stage One argument by assuming that:

> (7:1) If this person says that he is thinking that that thing [the Lost Island] does not exist, *either* this person is thinking of something than which a greater cannot be thought, *or* he is not.

In both cases, two contradictory propositions are assumed as opposed alternatives in a single disjunction, which is a different instance of the Law of Excluded

Middle. These two examples provide more than enough precedents for devising a Constructive Dilemma relevant to Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise by deploying what we have gleaned from what he has already established.

Because the Nicene Creed is a declaration of faith, it necessarily *presupposes* the existence of the God it describes. That presupposition can be articulated as:

(35) The triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all [other] things, visible and invisible.

That mutual entailment contains two implications. Firstly, (35) says:

(35a) If God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible, then the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

That is obvious. If everything which exists, other than the triune God described by the Nicene Creed, has been made by Him, He must exist in order to make them all.

Secondly, (35) asserts explicitly what is presupposed by the Nicene Creed:

(35b) If the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all [other] things, visible and invisible.

That too is obvious. For the triune God it describes could not be the maker of all other things *if* He does not exist. That is all (35b) says, nothing more. To be clear, that implication does *not* imply that, if God exists, He *had* to create all the other existing things. To interpret (35b) as asserting that God was subject to some necessity to create anything is completely to misunderstand that implication. Anselm himself argued in the *Cur Deus Homo* that God could not be subject to any compulsion or prevention. God created the universe of His own free choice; there could not be any necessity compelling God to create anything. (35b) is not asserting any such necessity. Instead, the necessity it implies is what in the *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm called "a consequent necessity". Because God's being the maker of all [other] things is part of that creed's description of who God is, that creed presupposes that He exists. (35b) simply articulates that presupposition.

Given (35), I now propose a two-fold argument with the following instance of the Law of Excluded Middle as its over-arching premise:

(36) *Either* the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, *or* it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

We will see that (8:22) can validly be deduced from each alternative in (36).

6 Deducing Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise on Theological Grounds

The first leg of this constructive dilemma replicates the deduction of Anselm's Stage Three premise from the first clause of the Nicene Creed which was articulated in §8.4. While the basic idea underlying Anselm's original Stage Three argument is very simple, the reconstruction of it in Chapter 8 was complicated by the need to discharge the premise (8:23) in the course of the argument. But there is no need to replicate here the complicated way his conclusions were deduced in §8.6. Because this theological derivation of his premise will be embedded within the larger framework of Constructive Dilemma, it can simply be assumed that the first alternative in (36) is true and deduce (8:22) from it. Then, that assumption will be negated in the alternative leg of this dilemma, which will be presented in §10.7.

Since it is so important that every step in this Constructive Dilemma be transparent, I shall now repeat the deduction of (8:22), but with the commentary much abbreviated. The first leg of the dilemma begins by assuming that the first alternative in (36) is true. That is:

(37) The triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

It follows from (35) and (37), by *modus ponens*, that:

(38) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible.

To clarify the logical implications of (38), the following mutual entailment was then asserted as a conceptual truth in §8.4:

(39) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

It follows from (38) and (39), by *modus ponens*, that:

(40) God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

(40) is equivalent to:

(41) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, has been created by Him.

Now it is a conceptual truth that:

(42) Whatever exists as a result of being created does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of intrinsic necessity.

And it is a logical truth that:

(43) Whatever does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of intrinsic necessity is able not to exist.

It follows from (42) and (43), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(44) Whatever exists as a result of being created is able not to exist.

So, it now follows from (41) and (44), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(45) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, is able not to exist.

From (45), it follows, by Anselm's Conceivability rule, that:

(46) Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, can be thought not to exist.

And, of course, as Anselm said in *Reply* v:

(47) What does not exist is able not to exist, and what is able not to exist can be thought not to exist.

So, conjoining (45) and (46), it follows that:

(48) Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

(48) is the same as (8:22), which Anselm then expressed as his Stage Three premise (8:23). For it follows from (34) and (48) that "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist".

7 Deducing Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise on Cosmological Grounds

Lest it be objected that the question of God's existence has been begged in §10.6 by deducing (48) from the assumption (37), let us assume the opposite of (37), namely:

(49) It is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

If (49) is true, it follows from (35) and (49), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(50) It is false that God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all [other] things visible and invisible.

Now, because (50) is entailed by the assumption (49), it is not possible to deduce that God the Father Almighty is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought from (25), which says that "It is necessary that that only one existing thing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought".

But not only is it not possible to deduce that, but it follows from (25) and (50), by *modus tollens*, that:

(51) It is not possible that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

However, Anselm has proven in Stage Three of his proof that "You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought", so there is no way that he could ever accept that (51) is true.

While those three propositions are negative, (33) and (9:14*), which are equivalent, have been validly deduced independently of both the assumptions (37) and (49). Since (33) is compatible with (49), (49) and (33) may be conjoined:

(52) Even if it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, it is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

7.1 *Deducing Anselm's Premise Independently of the First Leg*

It is important for the argument which is to follow that, while the assumption (49) implies that God the Father Almighty is not the Creator of everything else, it does not imply that that belief *cannot even be thought*. Indeed, unless that could be thought the implication of (50) from (49) would not be intelligible, as it manifestly is. Although atheists endorse the assumption (49), I am not aware of any who argue that it is could not even *conceivable* that the universe and everything in it might have been created. No wonder: to argue that that is inconceivable would require maintaining that the concept of creation is *impossible*. Atheists do not typically express their disbelief as strongly as that – nor do they need to.

Anselm has a good reason to reject this both the premise and the consequence of this inference because he had asserted in *Proslogion* III that:

(R1) *If some mind could think of something better than You, a creature would be ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, which is completely absurd.*

To recall, I commented in §8.3 that it follows by *reductio ad absurdum* from Anselm's asserting that the consequent in (R1) is completely absurd that its antecedent is false. That is:

(8:1) It is not possible that some mind can think of something better than You.

I showed there that by invoking the definition of "greater than", (3), that the following implication is entailed by (8:1):

(8:4) If it is not possible that some mind can think of something better than You, then You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Because the second clause in (R1) presupposes that the God whom Anselm is addressing is the Creator of all other things, it was validly deduced in §8.3 from (8:1) that:

(8:5) If You are the Creator of all other things, then it is not possible that some mind can think of something better than You.

Inferring (8:5) discharged the dependence of (8:1) on that presupposition. It was then inferred in §8.3 from (8:4) and (8:5) that:

(8:7) If it can be thought that You are the Creator of all other things, then it can be thought that You are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Because that implication can be understood, so can its antecedent. It is equivalent to:

(8:8) To think of God as the Creator of all things is to think of something than which a greater could not be thought.

(8:8) could only be true if it is possible to think that God is the Creator of everything else. Indeed, (8:1) is logically equivalent to "It is necessary that every mind is able to think of nothing better than You". Since it is manifest that Anselm *understands* what he has written, the argument in (R1) implies that:

(8:9) It can be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that You are the Creator of all other things.

I have summarized the deduction of (8:7) and (8:9) in §8.3 because it establishes those two propositions without depending upon any presupposition to the effect that the God whom Anselm is the Creator of all other things, or even that He exists. It follows from (34) and (8:7) that:

(53) If it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things, it can be thought that He is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

(53) is a conceptual truth because it has been derived from the logical truths, (8:4) and (8:5). It likewise follows from (34) and (8:9) that:

(54) It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.

Neither (53) nor (54) begs the questions of whether God exists or whether He is the Creator of all other things. But, to quote a phrase Anselm uses more than once, anyone with a rational mind is able to understand the deduction of (53) and (54).

Now, if it is *not impossible* that the God described in the Nicene Creed is the Creator of all other things, Anselm's Conceivability rule would permit (53) to be validly inferred as a conceptual truth. However, so far no premise in this cosmological Stage Three argument mentions God. So I am content to assert (54) as a new premise which has been justified in §8.3.

It now follows from (53) and (54), by *modus ponens*, that:

(55) It can be thought that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

The considerations which have been adduced concerning Stage Three of Anselm's proof have now generated a potential contradiction. The assumption (49) implies that (51): "It is not possible that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought". But now (55) says that the opposite of (51) can be thought. If the thought in (55) were true, there would be an explicit contradiction. That inconsistency has to be resolved. But how?

Well, it is a logical truth that *either* God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, *or* He is not. Let us first assume that the thought in (55) is true. That is:

(56) God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Now, it has been established in line (25) in §10.3 above that "It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought". So, it follows from (25) and (56), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(57) God the Father Almighty is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

That identity licenses the substitution of "God the Father Almighty" in lieu of "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" in (26), which says that "It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely". So, making that substitution in (26), as (57) permits, it follows that:

(58) It is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

Since (58) has been deduced from the supposition (56), it follows from (56) and (58), by Conditional Proof, that:

(59) If God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

That discharges the assumption (56). Applying Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule to (59) yields:

(60) If it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

It follows from (55) and (60), by *modus ponens*, that:

(61) It can be thought that it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

Let us now consider that the thought in (55) is false. There is no other alternative. That is:

(62) God the Father Almighty is *not* something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Since (25) says that "It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought", and (26) says that "It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely", it follows from (25) and (26), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(63) It is not possible that anything other than that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely.

It then follows from the supposition (62) and (63), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(64) It is not possible that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

As was noted on line (14) in §3.7, Anselm maintains that the following is a conceptual truth:

(65) Whatever is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.

As I have observed in §3.7, not only is (65) true when expressed using the Latin verb "*intelligere*", but it is also true when expressed using the English verb, "to understand". It is also relevant that Anselm distinguishes in *Proslogion* IV between the way in which something is thought when the words signifying a thing is thought, and the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood. So, it follows from the impossibility asserted in (64) and the principle (65), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(66) It cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

So, it follows from (62), which supposed that the thought in (55) is false, and (66), by Conditional Proof, that:

(67) If God the Father Almighty is *not* something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it cannot be thought that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.

That discharges the assumption (62).

However, the consequent of (67) is contradicted by (61), which is dependent only upon the four premises introduced in Stage One and the premise (54). For the assumption (56) was discharged in deducing (59). So, it is not possible that the consequent of (67) is true. Therefore, it follows from (61) and (67), by *modus tollens*, that:

(68) It is not possible that God the Father Almighty is not something than which a greater cannot be thought.

(68) is equivalent to:

(69) It is necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Invoking (25) again, it follows from (25) and (69), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(70) It is necessary that God the Father Almighty is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

Now, it has been proven in §10.3, independently of the opposed assumptions (37) and (49), that:

(33) It is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.

Therefore, it follows by substituting "God the Father Almighty" in lieu of "that -than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" in (33), as (70) permits, that:

(71) It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

The propositions (70) and (71) are dependent only upon the premises (1), (2), (3), (4) and (54), because the alternative suppositions – that God the Father Almighty is, or is not, something than which a greater cannot be thought – were both discharged.

So Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise, which was deduced both in §8.4 and in §10.6 from theological premises, has now been proven on *cosmological* grounds. For while (33), from which (71) has been deduced, is dependent upon the first four of those premises, it is equivalent to (9:14*). Not only are the premises (1) and (2) cosmological in nature, but (9:14*) was proven in §10.4 from the cosmological criteria which Anselm discerned in *Reply* I and summarized in *Reply* IV. So (33) has to be understood as a truth based upon cosmological considerations.

7.2 *Inferring That the Triune God Described in the Nicene Creed Exists*

However, the proposition (69) is inconsistent with (51), which was deduced from the assumption (49). Conjoining those two propositions yields:

(72) It is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

It follows from (49) and (72), by Conditional Proof, that:

(73) If it is false that the God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then it is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

However, it is logical truth that:

(74) It is not possible that it is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

So, it follows from (73) and (74), by *modus tollens*, that:

(75) It is not possible that it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

(75) is equivalent to:

(76) It is necessarily true that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.

It might be objected that the deduction of (76) is a disgraceful example of begging the question, for it is simply a roundabout way of stating the obvious contradiction between the two assumptions (37) and (49). However, such an objection would misrepresent how (76) has been deduced. (76) is dependent on the premises (1), (2), (3), (4), and (54). The premise (54) was justified by reflecting upon Anselm's assertion (R1), which presupposed that God is the Creator of all other things. But the point of (R1) is to establish that to *think* of the Creator is to *think* of something than which no better could be thought. (54) neither asserts nor presuppose either that God exists or that He is the Creator; it merely asserts that it *can be thought* that He is. And that it surely true. What Anselm rejects in (R1) as "completely absurd" is a *thought*. That is why I proposed in §8.3 that what Anselm's reason (R1) entailed is the implication (53) and the premise (54). Consequently, neither (53) nor (54) make any claims about what is in reality. In particular, they are not claiming that God exists and is the Creator – only that it can be thought that there is a Creator of

all other things, and that to think of the Creator is to think of something than which nothing better could be thought.

Nothing in the deduction of (76) is dependent upon the assumption (37). It is true that in the first, positive leg of this dilemma (40) says that "God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things". But (54) says no more than that it is possible to think (40) – not that (40) is true. What the deduction of (76) has shown is that if it can even be thought that (40) is true, it is necessarily true.[1]

I must confess to be very surprised to have proven (76). When I began drafting this chapter I had no idea that it could be proven in this way that it is necessarily true that the triune God described in the Nicene Creed exists. My intention was simply to bring together Anselm's own Stage Three argument in *Proslogion* III with an argument designed to establish that "Only one thing cannot be thought not to exist" as a way of vindicating his Stage Three premise, and then finding some non-controversial way of identifying that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought as God. Because in Chapter 8 I had interpreted (R1) as implying (8:7) and (8:9) and had deduced (8:22) independently of them, it became clear how (9:14*), which is equivalent to (33), could validly be deduced and that it would take only one more step to identify that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought as God the Father Almighty. That sufficed to establish that the assumption (49) is impossible.

8 Justifying Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise in the Strongest Possible Way

It has now become possible to justify Anselm's Stage Three premise: "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist" in a form stronger than he expressed it in *Proslogion* III.

In the positive leg of this dilemma, in §10.6, the proposition "Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist" was validly deduced on line (48) from the assumption (37). So, it follows from (37) and (48), by Conditional Proof, that:

1 This implication has the same form as the first argument Anselm presents in the *Reply*. For he argued there that "If something-than-which-a-greater-cannot be thought can be thought to exist, it exists out of necessity". That argument was examined in Chapter 5 and it was found that each of two premises are justified and that the argument is valid. Furthermore, since the antecedent of that conclusion is implied by "It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot be thought exists", which was established in §3.4, the conclusion of the constructive dilemma in *Reply* I has the same form as the constructive dilemma demonstrated above.

(77) If the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

Since that deduction involved only conceptual and logical truths, that implication is itself a necessary truth. It is a well-recognized rule of inference that if the conditional implication "If *p* then *q*" is necessary, then if it is necessary that *p*, it is necessary that *q*. Since it been proven on line (76) that the antecedent of (77) is necessary, it follows from (76) and the necessity of (77), by that rule, that:

(78) It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

That conclusion has been deduced from the assumption (37) in the first leg of this dilemma in §10.6. So, it follows from (37) and (78), by Conditional Proof, that:

(79) If the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then it is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

Likewise, in §10.7, where the negative leg of this dilemma was articulated, that same proposition (78) has been validly deduced on line (71) from the premise (54) and (33), which has become the consequent of (52). Then, in §10.7.2 it was demonstrated that that same premise entails that the assumption (49) is impossible. So, conjoining that demonstration with substituting "God the Father Almighty" for "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot be thought" in (52), as (70) permits, it follows that:

(80) If it is assumed that it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then, because it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things, not only is that assumption impossible, but also it is necessary that whatever is other than Him can be thought not to exist.

According to the rule of Constructive Syllogism, it is valid to infer from "*p* or *q*" that "*r* or *s*", provided "*r*" has been validly deduced from "*p*" and "*s*" has been validly deduced from "*q*". Since (36) is a disjunction, it follows by that rule from (36), (79) and (80) that *either* the consequent of (79) is true *or* the consequent of (80) is true. But those two consequents say the same! So it follows from

the instance of the Law of Excluded Middle, (36), by the rule of Constructive Syllogism, that:

(81) It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

(81) has been proven in the strongest possible way. Since (34) says that "The God whom Anselm is addressing as 'You, Lord our God' throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed", it follows from (34) and (81), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(82) It is necessary that whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

Thus Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise has been proven to be necessarily true in the strongest possible way. That conclusion is dependent only upon:
- The four premises which entail the conclusions of Stages One and Two of the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof: (1), (2), (3), and (4);
- The factual premise (34): "The God whom Anselm is addressing as 'You, Lord our God' throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed"; and
- The premise (54): "It can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things".

No longer can it be objected that (8:23) is too strong to be acceptable as a premise, for it is implied by the instance of the Law of Excluded Middle, (36), which encompasses all logical possibilities.

9 Deducing Anselm's Stage Three Conclusions

Since Anselm's Stage Three premise has not only been justified as he expressed it using the pronoun "You", but also in a stronger form than he asserted it, he is entitled to deploy it as a fully justified premise from which to deduce his conclusions about God. This deduction will not only establish the truth of Anselm's two conclusions, but they will also be proven to be uniquely and necessarily true of the God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

It follows from (29), which is equivalent to the interim conclusion of Stage Two, (6:38), and (82), which has been validated by having been deduced from (36), the instance of the Law of Excluded Middle, that:

(83) It is necessary that You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

Thus, the first conclusion which Anselm announced at the beginning of Stage Three has now been validly deduced in a stronger form than he asserted. In *Proslogion* III, referring to the conclusion of Stage Two, Anselm expresses the conclusion (83) as:

(83*) This is You, Lord our God.

Anselm infers his second conclusion immediately from (83*). He is right to do so, for the conclusion of Stage Two, which was proven on line (41) in Chapter 6, says:

(5) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

It follows from (5) and (83), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(84) It is necessary that You alone so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.

That the conclusion (84) follows so immediately from the identity established in (83) will be significant when, in Chapter 11, a number of proposals as to the identity of Anselm's *unum argumentum* will be reviewed

The conclusion which Anselm asserts in *Proslogion* III is not as strong as (84). He is content to infer from (83*) that:

(84*) You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.

By addressing God as "You, Lord *my* God", Anselm is claiming that conclusion as his very own achievement. He has every right to do so. For not only has his logic entailed (84*), but he has discerned that the first two objectives which he hoped his *unum argumentum* would demonstrate have now been fulfilled. I will be examining various proposals as to what Anselm's *unum argumentum* is in the following chapter.

It was shown in §8.7 that a number of corollaries follow from (84), so there is no need to show again how they are entailed by (84). May it suffice to note

that it has already been shown in §8.7 that the following three corollaries are entailed by (84):

(85) God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
(86) Necessarily, it is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.
(87) It is necessary that You alone have being most truly of all [*verissime omnium*], and for that reason most greatly of all [*maxime omnium*].

When Anselm deduced the conclusion (87) in *Proslogion* III, he did not deduce it as a necessary truth. But (87) is what follows from the argument presented here. It has profound implications which will be discussed in §13.1.

10 An Alleged Counter-Example to Anselm's Stage Three Premise

While it has been demonstrated that Anselm's Stage Three premise is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, and has now been justified in the strongest way possible, it has been suggested to me that his premise is too comprehensive to be true. A philosophical colleague has reminded me that some mathematicians and philosophers maintain that abstract objects, such as the natural numbers, and (according to some philosophical theories) propositions, also exist necessarily.

There is a well-recognized, but hotly debated, position in the philosophy of mathematics called Platonism, which maintains that numbers are abstract objects which exist timelessly, independently of intelligent agents and their language, thought, and practices.[2] If numbers exist timelessly and necessarily, Anselm cannot immediately infer that they can be thought not to exist. Yet it seems that must be the case that they can be thought not to exist if his crucial premise is to be true. Also, Bernd Goebel has asked,

> What about those other candidates for necessary existence like numbers: Are they created or are they somehow divine, and can they or can they

2 See the entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by Øystein Linnebo entitled, 'Platonism in the Philosophy of Mathematics'. Linnebo points out that this position is now defined and debated independently of the views of the historical writer Plato. It is a purely metaphysical view.

> not be thought not to exist? As far as I can see, Anselm does not discuss this problem.[3]

These challenges raise the question: What does it mean to assert that something exists?

It has already been noted in §1.6.1 and again in §3.5 that Anselm deploys two different conceptions of existence in the *Proslogion*. The argument in Stage One is conducted in terms of the binary conception of existence – being in reality – but he then switches in *Proslogion* III to a conception of existence which allows that existence can be more or less intense. These two different conceptions of existence will be discussed in Chapter 12.

It seems when it is said that abstract objects such as numbers "exist", the sense in which they exist is a different conception again. For as I have already remarked in §9.4.7, what is distinctive about mathematics is that propositions about numbers and geometrical figures are *tenselessly* true; it makes no sense to ask, "*When* did 2 plus 3 equal 5"! "Forever" does not seem to be the appropriate answer. So if numbers exist, they do not exist anywhere or at any time. The only connection numbers have to space and time is that we use numbers to count things which exist in spacetime.

We do not know what Anselm's position was on the ontological status of mathematics, since he never systematically addressed the topic. But he has written a rather obscure passage in *Proslogion* XX where he argues that even eternal things [*aeterna*] can be thought not to exist. For he writes:

> *For in what way, are You beyond those things which will not have an end? Is it because without You they cannot exist at all, whereas You are in no way lessened even if they return to nothingness. So indeed, in a certain way, You are beyond them.*

It is not at all clear to what he is referring. Most probably he is thinking of angels, since in *Proslogion* XXV he twice refers to angels. Howbeit, Anselm argues that these 'eternal things' can be thought not to exist because they cannot exist at all without God. He then comments that "in a certain way they indeed have an end". While he does not explain what that "certain way" is, it seems to be nothing more than that God is *able* to destroy them, even if He would never choose to do so. Since he then describes these eternal things as having a past and a future, the sense in which they are eternal is that they are everlasting. So, he is not talking about numbers in this passage, since numbers

3 Personal communication, 5 April 2019.

are not everlasting. Yet the passage is not irrelevant. For just as Anselm seems to be contemplating the possibility that God could, if He chose, end the existence of even eternal things, so, if numbers are also created, they likewise could be thought not to exist, because without God, they too would not exist at all.

Interestingly, Bernd Goebel has informed me that Gilbert Crispin discusses the question whether God is identical to the natural numbers in a section in his dialogue *De angelo perdito*, inspired by Boethius's *De institutione arithmetica*, but quite original.[4] Goebel comments that "this might seem a somewhat problematic position given that Gilbert asserts God's Trinity". Goebel reports that, perhaps for that reason, "Crispin concludes, or rather states, that the numbers have been created by God". Given that Crispin and Anselm became close friends, we may speculate that Anselm might also have thought that numbers are created by God.

Be that as it may, the prevailing position throughout the medieval period was that of Augustine, who identified numbers as Ideas in the mind of God, for that explained their timelessness. But in the 17th century that position was challenged by Descartes, who argued in his *Meditations* that even truths of arithmetic can be thought to be false. As part of his deploying systematic doubt in search of a proposition which could not be doubted, he imagined that an evil demon had so made him that whenever he added 2 and 3 it was possible that the answer "5" might be false. Even more radically, he proposed that even the eternal truths were *created* – products of God's will – and the reason why they are unchangeable is simply that God does not change His will. However, since God's will is not bound by necessity, it is *possible* that mathematical truths could be different, and therefore could be thought to be different.

Once that break with the Augustinian conception had occurred, the way was open for even more radical ideas. Within a generation, Thomas Hobbes seized on the idea that mathematics was indeed created – but not by God! He wrote, "We are able to demonstrate geometrical propositions because *we* create them".[5] Soon after, Giambattista Vico grounded Hobbes' dictum in a systematic understanding of what is required for perfect knowledge. Arguing that perfect knowledge is available only to the maker of what is known, he wrote,

4 Gilbert Crispin was born about 1055 and was sent at the age of 10 to live at the monastery of Bec, where he later became a monk and studied under Anselm. In 1085 he was appointed by Lanfranc to be the abbot of Westminster Abbey.

5 Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*.

> We are able to demonstrate geometrical propositions because we create them; were it possible for us to supply demonstrations of propositions of physics, we would be capable of creating them *ex nihilo* as well.[6]

So the ground had been prepared for the emergence in the 19th Century of two systems of geometry which are alternatives to Euclid's geometry. Many attempts to deduce Euclid's fifth postulate from the other axioms had proven fruitless. That postulate stated that for any given line and any point not on that line, there is only one line through the point which is parallel to that line. Eventually it was concluded that that postulate is independent of the other axioms. So replacing it with an alternative postulate would not render the resulting geometry inconsistent. The Hungarian mathematician János Bolyai and the Russian mathematician Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky independently proposed that, instead of Euclid's fifth postulate, *more than* one line can be extended through any given point and run parallel to another line of which that point is not part. Then, in 1854 Bernhard Reimann demonstrated that there are *no* parallel lines on any surface curved in three or more dimensions, and that an infinitely large group of such geometries could be constructed. So at least three radically different types of geometry are possible.

Likewise, the whole issue of the status of arithmetic was transformed in the latter half of the 19th Century. A number of mathematicians contributed to a new way of understanding arithmetic: not just as a series of numbers, but as an axiomatic system analogous to the various systems of geometry. That led Giuseppe Peano to publish in 1889 a simplified version of the various axiomatizations of arithmetic. All of Peano's axioms, except the induction axiom, are statements in first-order logic, so that seems sufficient to ensure that numbers exist in the same sense as the things which are *in reality*. But to infer that is to overlook significant differences.

Given Peano's axioms, all the natural numbers are derived from the number 0. But if 0 is a number, it has not crossed the threshold into reality. It is not possible to count of number of apples in a fruit bowl if there are none. So, in Peano's system of axioms, 0 is not the number of anything which exists. Since all the other natural numbers are defined as successors of 0, all numbers have whatever ontological status the number 0 has. It follows inexorably that natural numbers do not exist in the same sense that the Eiffel Tower exists, for that tower is in reality.

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6 Giambattista Vico, *De Nostri Temporis Studiorum Ratione*, IV.

It is true that arithmetical theorems have the form: "There is [something] which …", such as "There is a number which is prime and even". But what such theorems mean is that within the domain established by the axioms postulated as defining that system, it is provable that there is a number which is prime and even. Numbers have no other mode of existence.

The developments in arithmetical theory thereafter tell a fascinating story, but it would be too distracting to retell it here. It is enough to report that just four years later, Gottlob Frege showed how Peano's axioms could in turn be derived from the new system of formal logic which he invented. For he realized the number "nought" could be derived from supposing that all those things of which a given predicate is true constitute a set, and number "nought" could be defined as the number of the null set, that is, the set which has no members. But that way of introducing sets into his logic allowed contradictions also to be deduced, which was a fatal blow.

There are now a number of alternative set theories, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. One feature shared by all of them is that however sets are defined, they are not on the same level as their members. That is required to rule out the contradictions generated in Frege's system. So, in any set theory, whatever sense attaches to the 'existence' of sets, it is not the same as the sense in which myriads of individuals exist for some time but not always, and the sense in which Anselm and others contend that God exists.

It follows that numbers are not counter-examples to Anselm's Stage Three premise, "Whatever is other than God can be thought not to exist". For sets and the natural numbers associated with them, are constructions produced by whichever set theory is preferred, and none of them exist in the same sense of the verb "exist" in Anselm's premise. So the three conclusions which Anselm deduces in *Proslogion* III still stand as proven beliefs.

11 Comparing the Cosmological Reformulation of Anselm's Proof with the Original

Now that I have presented the cosmological reformulation of Stage Three of Anselm's proof of the existence of God, it is appropriate to compare it with the proof he presented in *Proslogion* II and III. That will provide an overview of the journey travelled.

The first and most obvious difference is in how the two begin. Anselm begins with imagining that he has spoken aloud his belief that "You are something than which nothing greater could be thought", and has been overheard by the Fool. As he keeps emphasizing in the *Reply*, what he proves concerns what is

spoken of [*quod dixit*]. That has the virtue of ensuring that all the statements made are 'owned' by someone, a feature vividly highlighted by his casting the *Proslogion* as a whole as an address to God.

Having read Boethius' prescription for 'finding arguments', Anselm knows that he has to establish common ground with his opponent, and build his proof from there. That is why his proof begins with his writing:

> *When the Fool hears what I am speaking of: something than which nothing greater can be thought, he understands what he hears.*

So he begins his proof with a publicly observable fact: he has spoken those words. It is enough for the purpose of establishing common ground with the Fool that he establishes that the Fool is bound to concede that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is in the understanding, even though it does not follow that the Fool is thinking of any particular thing so described.

The cosmological reformulation of his proof also begins by establishing common ground with the Fool, because its first premise is a publicly confirmed but falsifiable fact:

> (4:1) Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.

That, however, is one respect in which the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof departs from Anselm's original argumentative strategy. As we saw in §1.1, in the Preface Anselm reported how he hoped to discover a single reason [*unum argumentum*] "which need no other than itself alone for proving itself and for demonstrating alone that God truly exists", and many other beliefs about God. I shall argue that what I identify as his *unum argumentum* does indeed 'prove itself' and does succeed in demonstrating alone that God truly exists and all the other objectives which Anselm lists in the Preface. However, in order to prove his Stage One conclusion without deducing it from assuming that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, (4:1) was introduced as a premise which entailed the conclusions of each of the three stages of his proof. So, in this cosmological reformulation of his proof, another *argumentum* has been needed in order that his *unum argumentum* could 'prove itself'. I acknowledge that that is a significant difference between the two proofs.

As explained in Chapter 2, I have devised this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof so that none of his conclusions are dependent upon establishing that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the

understanding. For the reformulation of Stage One does not infer that that thing is in reality from its being in the understanding. As observed in §2.1, that Anselm proceeds in that way is the major objection critics have to Anselm's proof. It was to avoid that objection that I have developed this reformulated version of his proof. I am claiming to have demonstrated that the conclusions of all three stages of his proof have been validly deduced without deducing anything about reality from its being in the understanding.

So that my position is clear, I have no objection to Anselm's Stage One argument on that ground. Indeed, I interpreted the arguments which Anselm presented in *Reply* 1 as designed to demonstrate the validity of inferring the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought from thinking of it. In Chapter 5 I not only demonstrated the validity of those arguments, but I also showed the premises of his first argument are justified. My objections are to the persistent promulgation of a distorted and fallacious misrepresentation of his Stage One argument, and to the mistranslations of his Stage Two premise. There is no doubt that Anselm's reasoning throughout all three stages is valid. Furthermore, the definition of "greater than" and the premise implicit in his explanation of how any rational mind can come to conceive 'something than which nothing greater could be thought': "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good" render his reasoning transparent and plausible.

Nor am I claiming that this cosmological reformulation is *better* than Anselm's original. I acknowledge that some readers of the *Proslogion* assess that his proof is all the stronger for validly deducing the conclusions of all three stages in a way which is impressively self-contained. In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I defended the argument he presented in the *Proslogion*, and I do not resile from that even though I have since come to a different understanding of Stage Three of his proof.

I submit that this cosmological reformulation of his proof is not inimical to it. Anselm makes it clear in the Preface that his intention was to discover a proof which would be entirely self-contained, and yet demonstrate all the objectives he listed. Nevertheless, when challenged by Gaunilo, he did not hesitate to invoke the premise:

> (9:1) *All those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end or are a conjunction of parts – as I have already said, whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality – could be thought not to exist*.

Moreover, in *Reply* 1 he presented the arguments examined in Chapter 5, the premises of which were justified by being deduced for the first two premises of this cosmological reformulation of his argument. So, he himself turned to

cosmological considerations which are external to the self-contained proof in the *Proslogion* in order to defend it.

The conclusions proven in Stage One of this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof in Chapter 4 are not quite the same as in Anselm's original Stage One. In *Proslogion* II Anselm chose to deduce:

> (C1) There exists, therefore, beyond doubt, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, both in the understanding and in reality.

In Chapter 4, as Stage One of this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, it has been proven that

> (4:34) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.

That (4:34) is endorsed by Anselm himself is shown by his asserting in *Reply* 1:

> *Therefore, in no way does it* [i.e., something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *not exist as a totality somewhere and at some time, but it exists always and everywhere as a totality*.

It was also proven in Chapter 4 that

> (4:53) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

That conclusion is much stronger than the analogous conclusions which Anselm deduced in *Reply* 1. He presented three arguments there, all of which establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist. But the conclusion of the first argument – the one based on existing with a beginning – is qualified by "If it can be thought to exist". The conclusions of the other two arguments – which together constitute a constructive dilemma – are qualified by "If it can be thought". As I have observed above, the point of those arguments is to demonstrate the validity of inferring the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought from thinking of it. (4:53), however, is unconditional. It too demonstrates that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, but shows that that conclusion does not have to depend upon establishing first of all that that 'something' is in thought.

The logical relation of the argument in *Proslogion* II to the one in the first half of *Proslogion* III has been an issue debated from time to time ever since Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne independently claimed in the 1960s that they had discovered a second ontological argument in *Proslogion* III. Those debates have been much bedevilled by ignorance and confusion, aggravated by bad translations, as I argued in §6.1. Deducing (4:53) as a Stage One conclusion has significantly clarified the relation of those two stages, for it has been demonstrated in §6.2 how it entails what I claim to be Anselm's Stage Two premise:

(6:18) If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.

In *Proslogion* III Anselm asserts the consequent of (6:18) as his Stage Two premise, with no explanation as to how he has derived it. But the logic of his argument requires that he be understood to be deriving the consequent of (6:18) from a stronger version of the conclusion (C1). For while (1) is the conclusion which appears in the text of *Proslogion* II, he could just as validly have deduced from the contradiction he generates that:

(C1*) It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.

Since Anselm does not explicitly deduce (C1*) in *Proslogion* II, proving (4:53) has made all this much simpler and more straightforward. For, as was shown in §6.2, (4:53) straightforwardly entails: "It can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist". I submit that that settles the issue of the relation of Stage Two to Stage One.

The difference between (C1*) and (4:53) is the only respect in which the reformulated version of Stage Two differs from Anselm's original version in *Proslogion* III, although the difference between Anselm's Stage One premises and the premises of the reformulated Stage One carry over into Stage Two.

Because (4:53) entails Anselm's Stage Two premise, it also entails the interim conclusion of Stage Two: "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist". Therefore it follows that:

(6:39) *Because* it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.

Modifying somewhat an insightful proposal of David Smith, I claim that that proposition (6:39) is what justifies Anselm's Stage Two conclusion:

(6:41) Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.

Anselm can validly infer that conclusion because he has proven that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist from the necessary truth (C1*). But since the premise of Stage Two is entailed by the much stronger proposition (4:53), something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is shown to exist even more intensely than (C1*) establishes.

So his Stage Two conclusion is even stronger when it is deduced in the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof than in the original version which Anselm presents in the *Proslogion*. And since in Stage Three Anselm deduces that what is true of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is true of the God to whom he resumed his address, he has proven that God exists even more intensely than he was able to argue in *Proslogion* III.

In the second half of *Proslogion* III Anselm only presented his two conclusions and two reasons without any explanation. So it is understandable that few commentators have recognized that this is where Anselm concludes that God exists. However, ever since I first read the *Proslogion* nearly fifty years ago, it has seemed obvious to me that Anselm wrote this passage as Stage Three of his proof. This book is my third attempt to convince other commentators that no other interpretation is compatible with the text.

I have tried to demonstrate that in this book so that no longer will his proof of the existence of God be misinterpreted as contained wholly in *Proslogion* II, as is standardly maintained. I also maintain, and will argue in the following chapter, that is it also a misinterpretation to insist that it takes Anselm almost the whole of the *Proslogion* to prove the existence of the Christian God in whom Anselm believes, as some more hermeneutically sensitive scholars have contended.

It is unfortunate that Anselm gave no indication as to how the conclusions he asserted in the middle of *Proslogion* III could be deduced as proven truths from the two reasons he gave. He left it up to his readers to work out that out for themselves. I have suggested that Anselm may be excused for not giving any indication as to how he *proved* his conclusions because he was writing primarily for his brother monks and was on hand and could be asked to explain how the logical gaps in what he had written could be bridged. But that does not help us who, so may centuries later, have to work it out for ourselves.

Consequently, *any* reconstruction of how Anselm could have validly deduced those conclusions is inevitably somewhat speculative. Nevertheless, in Chapter 8 I was able to reconstruct an argument which validly deduces his two conclusions as proven truths, despite the fact that his two reasons express his belief that the God he is addressing is the Creator of all other things. The first reason he offers is:

(R1) *If some mind could think of something better than You, a creature would be ascending above the Creator, and passing judgement on the Creator, which is completely absurd.*

I now believe that Anselm provided that first reason, in part, as an indication to his readers that his second reason was also grounded in his belief that God is the Creator of everything else. Also, as I explained in §8.3, because the absurdity he adduces is not probative, but only *fitting*, I proposed a softer interpretation. It was shown there that (R1) entails:

(8:9) It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that You are the Creator of all other.

When Anselm's intention is asserting (R1) is interpreted as I have, it proved to offer what was required if his conclusions are to be deduced as proven truths from his second reason:

(R2) *Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.*

The largest change in my interpretation of Anselm's proof from the interpretation I presented in both *From Belief to Understanding* and in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* resulted from Bernd Goebel's intervention, which I discussed in Chapter 8. When I suddenly recognized that (R2) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, Anselm's Stage Three argument could no longer be construed as the metaphysical, non-theological argument as I had previously misunderstood it.

Because (R2) also presupposes that God exists and is the Creator of everything else, the only way Anselm could have deduced his conclusions as proven truths, as he evidently thought that he did, is to convert that a consequence he deduces from that premise into a hypothetical proposition and deduce those conclusions from that implication. For then the two conclusions which he announced can be *deduced* from his premise, without being

dependent upon that premise or upon the ultimate premise of this argument: the first clause of the Nicene Creed.

But I recognized that deducing his conclusions in that way might well seem contrived, and that some readers might well be suspicious of his proving that God exist from premises which presuppose that God is the Creator if all other things. That is why in this chapter I have presented a justification of his crucial premise (R2), by counterposing the deduction of (R2) from the Nicene Creed with an alternative argument which begins by assuming that it is false that the God described in that Creed exists. I warned my readers at the outset that that cosmological reformulation of Stage Three of Anselm's proof would unfortunately be very long, but no steps could be omitted if I were to *demonstrate* the truth of his crucial premise from that negative assumption.

There is nothing like that Constructive Dilemma in Anselm's original Stage Three argument. While the theological argument presented in §10.6 above repeats the deduction of the premise (R2) from the first clause of the Nicene Creed which first appeared in §8.3, the alternative argument presented in §10.7 above, is novel, although based on propositions which Anselm did present. The difference, which is large, between Anselm's original Stage Three and the justification of its crucial premise presented in this chapter is that in the latter his crucial premise is entailed by the same *cosmologically-based* premises which justified the conclusions of Stages One and Two.

Consequently, in this chapter Anselm's crucial but controversial premise (R2) has been validated in the strongest possible way, as entailed by an instance of the Law of Excluded Middle. I submit that validating that premise puts beyond question that Anselm has proven in Stage Three, that is, in *Proslogion* III, that the triune God described in the Nicene Creed is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Therefore, as Anselm himself said in *Proslogion* IV, whoever understands properly that which God is [*id quod deus est*] – that is, whoever understands that God is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – understands that God so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist.

CHAPTER 11

Anselm's *unum argumentum* and the Identity of God

It has now been demonstrated that the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof of the existence of God establishes validly the conclusions of each of the three stages of his original proof which he presented in *Proslogion* II and III. That this reformulation has been possible confirms that it is in *Proslogion* III that Anselm proves that God exists.

Furthermore, the reformulation in Chapter 10 of Stage Three of his proof demonstrates that the God whose existence he proves in the second half of *Proslogion* III is the God whom Christians worship and who is described by the Nicene Creed. Yet that interpretation has been disputed by some scholars who maintain that Anselm cannot prove the existence of the God whom Christians worship until he has identified God as the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in *Proslogion* XXIII.

This issue is entangled with two other related issues: What is the overall plot of the *Proslogion*? And what, exactly, is the *unum argumentum* which he foreshadowed in the Preface to the *Proslogion*? For, as was observed in §1.1, Anselm explained there how he searched to find a single *argumentum* which would enable many beliefs to be proven.

There are three very different proposals as to what Anselm's *unum argumentum* is: Ian Logan's proposal that it is a syllogism, that is, an argument of a form first systematized by Aristotle, consisting of two premises and a conclusion; Toivo Holopainen's proposal that it is the phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought"; and Bernd Goebel's proposal that it is the proposition, "God is that than which a greater cannot be thought". For that reason, the word "*argumentum*" will be left untranslated when I quote relevant passages.

After some discussion in §11.1 of the criteria Anselm stipulates in the Preface, the first of those proposals will be examined in §11.2. But it is entangled with the issue of where Anselm identifies something-than which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought as the Trinitarian God in whom he believes. That issue will be addressed in §11.3. But since the question of where Anselm establishes that identity is entangled with the issue of the overall plot of the *Proslogion*, §11.4 will be devoted to discerning what the overall plot of the *Proslogion* is. Then in §11.5 and §11.6 the other two proposals as to what is

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Anselm's *unum argumentum* will be explored. I then present and argue for my own proposal in §11.7 and §11.8.

That will lead into a discussion in §11.9 of Anselm's views on the different kinds of description which are used to refer to God.

1 Introducing the Criteria Which Anselm's *unum argumentum* Must Satisfy

The following passage shows that, for Anselm, the key to the argumentation in the whole of the *Proslogion* is his discovery of that *unum argumentum*. For he explains in the Preface:

> *I reflected on the fact that* [the *Monologion*] *was constructed by a linking together of many* argumentorum*, and began to ask myself whether a* unum argumentum *could be discovered which would need no other than itself alone for proving itself* [ad se probandum] *and for demonstrating* [ad astruendum] *alone that God truly exists, and that He is the Supreme Good, needing nothing else, and whom all things need that they might exist and might exist well, and whatever else we believe about the divine substance.*

It is not at all clear precisely what Anselm means when he uses the word *argumentum*, nor what his *unum argumentum* is. As Bernd Goebel has commented in an article reviewing Ian Logan's *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*:

> However, nowhere in the *Proslogion* nor anywhere else does [Anselm] ever explain what this single argument, exactly, consists in. Unfortunately, the answer to this question is far from obvious. It is one of the great challenges of any *Proslogion* interpretation to settle it.[1]

A few pages later, he writes:

> However, the impression one gets from studying the semantics of *argumentum* in the early middle ages is that the term is equivocal to such an extent that the evidence can serve to justify almost any reasonable interpretation of the phrase *unum argumentum* whatsoever. Thus,

1 Goebel, 'Anselm's Elusive Argument: Ian Logan – Reading the *Proslogion*', *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 1–22, at p. 14.

> *argumentum* in the Boethian tradition may stand for entities as different as concepts, propositions, and proofs.[2]

He remarks, however, that Anselm's criteria are certainly less ambiguous than the evidence which Holopainen reports, and therefore recommends that "Anselm's … criteria concerning his *unum argumentum* should be taken more seriously when trying to establish the nature of the 'single argument'".[3] I endorse that recommendation, since I can see no other way of settling this contentious issue.

In that review, Goebel emphasizes the importance of the objectives which Anselm has stipulated that the *unum argument* he hoped to discover would fulfil. For, as we can see from the passage quoted above, Anselm has prescribed that it would:

(a) need no other for proving itself than itself alone;
(b) need no other *argumentum* for demonstrating that God truly exists;
(c) demonstrate that He is the Supreme Good;
(d) demonstrate that God needs nothing else in order to exist;
(e) demonstrate that God is that whom all things need in order that they might exist and might exist well;
(f) demonstrate whatever else we believe about the Divine substance.

Any proposal which purports to identify Anselm's *unum argumentum* has to demonstrate how it satisfies all six of these criteria.

When I was writing *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, I was aware only of Logan's and Holopainen's proposals. Since I found both of them to be unsatisfactory, and having no better idea to offer, I took the easy option of suggesting that there was no need to choose between them. Given that Holopainen has demonstrated that the Latin word *argumentum* has a wide range of meanings, I resorted to saying that that we do not need to arbitrate between these interpretations. Running them together, I suggested that:[4]

> the most helpful way of interpreting this phrase is that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is indeed a single chain of argumentation, in which the conclusion of one stage serves as a premise, or one of a set of premises, in the next stage, with the whole unified by his deploying his crucial indefinite description again and again.

2 Goebel, 'Anselm's Elusive Argument', p. 17.
3 Goebel, 'Anselm's Elusive Argument', p. 17.
4 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 5.

I now realize how inadequate and ill-considered those comments are. I am ashamed that I wrote what I have quoted above, and now retract that suggestion.

2 Interpreting Anselm's *unum argumentum* as a Syllogism

It is all too easy to make the mistake of assuming that a word in medieval Latin means the same as a word in modern English which looks like the same. I pointed out in §1.1 that Anselm does not use the word "prove" in the strong sense in which theorems are proven from axioms in Euclidean geometry, although he takes great care to ensure that every conclusion he proves is validly deduced. Likewise, it is all too easy to assume when Anselm writes the word *argumentum* he means it in the same sense as the English word has when we speak of "Anselm's arguments". *Argumentum* had a wide range of uses in Latin, just as the word "argument" does in modern English.[5]

In all the secondary literature on Anselm's proof of the existence of God the word "argument" is used in the sense of the deductions he presented in the *Proslogion* and the *Reply*. That is the sense in which I too have been using that word throughout this book. So, when Ian Logan presents his proposal that Anselm's *unum argument* is a syllogism, he is seeking to establish that it is an 'argument' in that sense.

In his commentary on the *Proslogion*, Logan introduces "X" as shorthand to refer to the phrase *quo nichil maius cogitari potest* [than which nothing greater can be to thought] and its variants.[6] I object to this conflation of "*that*-than-which- …" and "*something*-than-which- …" because it completely obscures the logic of Anselm's deduction of both his Stage One and his Stage Two conclusions. Anselm introduces the singular term "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" in both Stages One and Two as an exemplar of "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" in order to deduce conclusions from a proposition containing that indefinite description. But he is always careful to generalize the subject of what he has deduced back to that indefinite description as he draws his conclusions.

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5 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an argument can be an exchange of views, especially a contentious or prolonged one; a reason advanced for or against some proposition; an articulated sequence of reasoned propositions; a summary of the subject-matter or line of reasoning of a book; and, in mathematics and formal logic, an independent variable determining the value of a function. The usage of the term is quite equivocal in both Latin and English.

6 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 92.

Nevertheless, I shall use Logan's misleading abbreviation "X" when I am discussing what he has written in order to report his claims faithfully. Using his abbreviation "X", Logan interprets the overall plot of the *Proslogion* to be a categorical syllogism, [A], of the following form:[7]

> A categorical syllogism of the form:
> 1. God is X (minor premise);
> 2. X is F (major premise), where F stands for "existent *in re*" or any attribute of God;
> 3. Therefore, God is F.

Indeed, he claims that that syllogism is Anselm's *unum argumentum*. He explains that:

> If we demonstrate of X everything we believe about God, then given what later in the history of philosophy is called 'the identity of indiscernibles', God is X, and what we have demonstrated of X we have demonstrated of God.[8]

Now, while it is not *impossible* that Anselm is anticipating by seven centuries Leibniz' Law of the Identity of Indiscernibles, that such an anachronistic form of argument is said to be the overall plot of the *Proslogion* is enough to set the warning bells ringing loudly. And so they should, for this alleged strategy construes the structure of Anselm's proof as much too similar to the Cartesian and Leibnizian arguments which Kant rightly refuted.

Logan says that "Anselm says that his argument must meet two criteria: it must (α) suffice on its own to (β) establish that God exists".[9] It is notable that Logan does not mention the first criterion which Anselm himself identifies: that his *unum argumentum* would (a) "need no other to prove itself than itself alone". Yet that is arguably the most significant criterion of all six.

He considers three other possibilities, one of which is that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the middle term "X" itself, but quickly dismisses it – in spite of its central role – on the grounds that it does not fulfil the criterion (β). His initial assessment of these options is that only [A] could fit the criterion (β),

7 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 125–26.
8 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 125–26.
9 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 126.

but it relies on another syllogism to establish its minor premise. He labels that other syllogism "[D]":

> A categorical syllogism of the form:
> 1. God is whatever it is better to be than not to be (assumption);
> 2. X is whatever it is better to be than not to be (by definition);
> 3. There is one thing that is whatever it is better to be than not to be;
> 4. Therefore, God is X.

He says that this is a proof of [A]:1, i.e., the major premise of [A].

The minor premise of this syllogism [D]:1 is a conclusion which Anselm deduced from the identity asserted in the question he has asked at the beginning of *Proslogion* V:

> *What therefore are You, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought?*

There is only one way to read that question. Anselm is taking it as already established that the God whom he is addressing as "*You, Lord God*" is properly described as "*than whom nothing greater can be thought*". Anselm can describe God that way because he has already established that God is X in *Proslogion* III.

However, in Logan's syllogism [D], that God ix X is presented as a conclusion deduced from [D]:1. That presents Anselm's deduction in *Proslogion* V the wrong way around. As will be shown in §11.8, Anselm *deduces* the proposition [D]:1 from having identified God as the Supreme Good, and he has deduced that God is the Supreme Good from his description of God as "*than whom nothing greater can be thought*". Thus, the syllogism [D] is the *converse* of the inference Anselm presents in *Proslogion* V. Since it is not possible that the converse of *any* implication is equivalent to the original implication, the syllogism [D] is a fallacy with an unjustified premise.

That is not all that is wrong with this syllogism. Logan cites *Proslogion* V, XIII, XXII, and XXIII as his warrant for [D]:3. However, all the propositions which occur in those later chapters also depend upon Anselm's having proven that God is X in *Proslogion* III, as we will see in §11.8. Logan says that:

> I have suggested that for Anselm X is unique, i.e. it belongs to a class with at least one, and no more than one, member. But Anselm does not appear

> to establish that this is case, although in *Reply* 5.13 he makes it clear that he regarded his argument as having done so.[10]

So, he suggests that since God as X is whatever it is better to be than not to be, it is better to be uniquely X than not uniquely X.[11]

However, when *Proslogion* II and III are interpreted as Anselm's proof of the existence of God, there is no need for the syllogism [D] to establish the minor premise of [A], because Anselm has proven that God alone is X in Stage Three of his proof. The uniqueness of X is established by that conclusion. So this attempt at establishing the uniqueness of X is not only implausible, but it is quite unnecessary. But because Logan maintains that it takes almost all of the *Proslogion* to establish that God is X, as we will see, he cannot avail himself of that way of establishing the uniqueness of X.

As for the major premise of [A], Logan alleges that it is established by another syllogism which he labels "[B]":

> A *reductio* argument of the form:
> 1. If X is not F, there is not X;
> 2. X cannot be both X and not X;
> 3. Therefore, X is F.

He says that this is a proof of [A]:2, i.e. the major premise of [A].

But in the *Proslogion* there is one, and only one, predicate which Anselm proves to be true of God because he has proven that it is true of X. That predicate is "so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist", which Anselm proves to be true of God in *Proslogion* III. Nowhere else in the *Proslogion* does Anselm argue that X is F where "F" stands for *any* attribute of God. After *Proslogion* IV, the subject of *all* his arguments is "You", not "X".

Logan does comment on the second reason which Anselm states to justify the conclusions he has just declared, that "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist", that:

> It is a characteristic of God alone not to be able to be thought not to exist. But he has already shown that this is a characteristic of X too. Thus God and X possess the same referent.[12]

10 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 184–85.
11 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 185.
12 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 96.

Exactly! No matter what X and Y might be, if X and Y possess the same referent, X is identical to Y. That comment shows that at that critical juncture in Anselm's proof, Logan has recognized that this is where Anselm establishes the identity of God and X. But by saying that "God and X possess the same referent" he has just contradicted his other comment on the same passage: "It takes [Anselm] much of the *Proslogion* to establish [that identity]".

Because in this proposal the two premises in [A] are derived from [B] and [D] respectively, it consists of a chain of three syllogisms. Nevertheless, Logan claims that "the establishing of the premises [A]:1 and [A]:2 is internal to the *unum argumentum*".[13] However, what he has presented as a single argument are three linked arguments with the conclusion of [A] inferred from the conclusions of [B] and [D] by the rule of Hypothetical Syllogism. Logan has clearly struggled to render his proposal plausible. In his review of Logan's book, Bernd Goebel comments: "But this is not very convincing, as he senses himself",[14] noting that Logan himself says:

> That may be as close as it is possible to get to understanding what Anselm means by the term '*unum argumentum*'.[15]

That concession indicates that Logan himself is aware that this interpretation is not altogether satisfactory. I'm sorry to say, it is quite unacceptable.

3 Identifying the God Whose Existence Is Proven in *Proslogion* III

It can be seen from the above that what renders the proposal that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the syllogism [A] so implausible is Logan's interpreting Anselm as merely making an unjustified claim in the second half of *Proslogion* III. Yet that is where Anselm exclaims:

> *And this is You, Lord our God. Therefore, You so truly exist, Lord my God, that You could not be thought not to exist.*

13 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 127.
14 Goebel, 'Anselm's Elusive Argument', p. 16, n. 37.
15 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 127.

Logan comments on that passage in *Proslogion* III that:

> Anselm starts out here on the path of showing the identity of God and this 'something'. It takes him much of the *Proslogion* to establish it.[16]

It is because of that interpretation of Stage Three of Anselm's proof that Logan cannot cite anything from that passage in order to explicate his proposal that the syllogism [A] is Anselm's *unum argumentum*. So, I turn now to discuss the issue of where in the *Proslogion* does Anselm establishes the identity of X as the God in whom he believes, and will return to discuss two alternative proposals as to what Anselm's *unum argumentum* is in in §11.5 and §11.6, respectively.

Logan is not the only commentator who insists that it takes Anselm almost the whole of the *Proslogion* to establish that the God in whom he believes is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Richard La Croix and Jasper Hopkins also take that view. And we shall see below that it appears that Bernd Goebel does too.

So it is understandable why Logan objected to my construing Anselm as presenting in *Proslogion* II and III a three-stage proof of the existence of the Christian God. For, as I have explained in Chapter 8, I had argued both in *From Belief to Understanding* and 42 years later in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* that there are two arguments in his Stage Three: one theological; the other metaphysical. I had argued that the premise of the metaphysical argument – "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist" – is not about God, but about everything else. Because of that, it is understandable that the 'metaphysical argument' has been read as proving the existence of some God, but not necessarily the existence of the God whom Christians worship. Logan commented on the exegesis I presented in *From Belief to Understanding* that:

> But, as I have already argued, the identity of God (i.e. the God Anselm believes in) and X cannot be established without the later chapters of the *Proslogion*. Campbell attempts to oppose this view by arguing that 'You (i.e. God) are X' acts as a premise in later chapters, including P15, and that this identity must already have been established. Anselm has certainly made the claim that God is X, and is in the process of justifying this claim.[17]

In *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* I responded to Logan's criticism by arguing that since Anselm's first conclusion is "This is You, Lord our God", the God

16 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 96.

17 Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, pp. 178–9 (my italics).

whose existence he then infers has to be the God in whom he and all Christians believe. Moreover, the name "Lord" [*dominus*] is the Latin translation of the Greek word "*Kyrios*" which is used throughout the New Testament, and is, in turn, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "*Adonai*" which is the word orthodox Jews vocalise when reading aloud the sacred name of God "*YHWH*". So, on that interpretation of Stage Three, the God whose existence Anselm proves in *Proslogion* III could not be anything other than the God in whom all Christians believe.

But I now have found even stronger grounds on which to defend that interpretation. It is Anselm himself, not I, who identifies the God whom he is addressing as the Creator in *Proslogion* III. For, it was demonstrated in §8.3 that the first clause of the Nicene Creed entails that:

(8:22) Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

Anselm expresses that consequence as:

(8:23) Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.

Since in (8:23) Anselm has substituted the pronoun "You" in lieu of "God the Father Almighty" in (8:22), there is no room for doubting that:

(8:24) The God whom Anselm is addressing as "*You, Lord our God*" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.

I therefore maintain more strongly than ever that it is beyond doubt that the God whose existence Anselm proves in Stage Three is the God in whom he and all Christians believe. That was confirmed in Chapter 10, where it was *proven* on line (76) in §10.7.2, that it is necessarily true that the triune God described in the Nicene Creed exists.

Thus, it has now been demonstrated that the God whose existence Anselm has proven in *Proslogion* III is the God described in the Nicene Creed. The reasoning reconstructed in Chapter 8 does not move *from* the Creator *to* the Trinity. Quite the contrary, that reasoning moves in the reverse direction. The first clause is extracted *from* the Nicene Creed and shown to entail Anselm's crucial premise. And that premise, together with the interim conclusion of Stage Two, entails that "This is You, Lord our God". And that first conclusion, together with the final conclusion of Stage Two entails that "You therefore, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist".

That same movement is replicated in the cosmological reformulation of Stage Three of Anselm's proof in Chapter 10. Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise was deduced there as necessarily true from the logical truth that "*Either* the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, *or* it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists". In the course of that deduction it was proven that the first alternative in that logical truth is necessarily true. There could not be stronger reasons to recognize that in Stage Three the God whose existence Anselm proves is the God described in the Nicene Creed.

It might be objected that the inferences presented do not suffice to establish that the God whose existence Anselm proves in *Proslogion* III is the Christian God. It proves the existence of a Creator, but the Creator is not equivalent to the triune God described in that creed. That objection misdescribes a very important issue. It is appropriate to ask whether a *different* argument, modelled on Anselm's proof, but based on a different belief as to who is the Creator, could also be valid. That is *another* question, which will be addressed in §13.1. But the God whose existence *Anselm* has proven could only be the Christian God, for three reasons.

Firstly, since the identity of the God to whom Anselm is praying does not change in the course of the *Proslogion*, the God whose help he beseeches in *Proslogion* I is the same as the God who in *Proslogion* III he identifies as the Creator, and whom he then identifies as *that*-than-which-a-greater cannot-be thought and whose existence he proves, and who in *Proslogion* XXIII he addresses as "You, God the Father", writing:

> *You, God the Father, are this good; it is Your Word that is Your Son.*

Secondly, it is not possible to acknowledge that in *Proslogion* III Anselm proves the existence of God the Father Almighty, who is the maker of all other things, but maintain that that is not equivalent to proving that the Christian God exists. To maintain that would divide the indivisible Trinity. That suggestion implies that God the Father Almighty is not the Father of his Son, Jesus Christ. I am no doubt that if that suggestion could be put to Anselm he would reply: "That cannot be".

Thirdly, Anselm refers to "You" as "greater" or "better" than anything else, or as "than which a greater" or "a better cannot be thought", or as "supremely good" in most of the chapters after *Proslogion* IV. If he has not demonstrated that God is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought until near the end of the *Proslogion*, many of the inferences he makes of the form "Therefore, You are …" would be invalid – including the inference just quoted.

It is true that Anselm does not explicitly mention the Trinity until *Proslogion* XXIII. When he does, having written the sentence quoted immediately above, he infers the belief which is central to the doctrine of the Trinity by writing:

> *And indeed there cannot be anything other than what You are, or something greater or lesser than You are, in the Word by which You speak Yourself, since Your Word is true even as You are truthful, and therefore it is truth itself, just as You are, and is none other than You. And You are so simple that from You there cannot be begotten anything other than what You are*.

Toivo Holopainen has remarked, "the Trinitarian nature of God is not argued for but assumed".[18] Indeed, it is often said that it is not possible to prove that God is triune. What is so novel about Anselm's argumentation is that he claims to have done so in *Proslogion* XXIII. How is that possible?

The answer is simple, *provided* we pay strict attention to the fact that Anselm addresses his conclusions to "You, Lord God". While the Trinitarian nature of God is not argued for in *Proslogion* XXIII, Anselm is not *assuming* there that the nature of God is Trinitarian. As has been demonstrated in Chapter 10, the God whom he addresses as "You" in *Proslogion* III is the God described by the Nicene Creed. That is what entitles him to refer to God as "You, God the Father" in *Proslogion* XXIII.

Moreover, when he writes "*there cannot be anything other than what You are, or something greater or lesser than You are*", as he does in the passage quoted above, that description is justified by his having established that "*This* [i.e., something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *is You, Lord our God*" in *Proslogion* III.

These puzzles arise only when his conclusions are transposed unthinkingly into the impersonality of third-person discourse. If we take his use of the second-person pronoun seriously, as we must, we will recognize that all his conclusions are addressed to the Trinitarian God in whom all orthodox Christians believe. The subject of all of Anselm's reasoning from *Proslogion* V onwards is not even about "God" – let alone about "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought". The subject of all his inferences from this point on is "You, than whom a greater cannot be thought", either explicitly or implicitly.

In fact, to deny that Anselm has established the identity of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and the Trinitarian God in whom he and all Christians believe has a disastrous consequence. For if he has *not* established that identity in *Proslogion* III, then *all* the conclusions which Anselm

18 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 32.

asserts in *Proslogion* V and thereafter would be *invalid*! The claim that Anselm cannot have established that the God who is addressing in *Proslogion* III is the Trinitarian God in whom Christians believe, is the converse of Anselm's inference in *Proslogion* XXIII. Not only does that claim misrepresent the text of the *Proslogion*, but it also renders what Anselm writes in *Proslogion* XXIII fallacious.

So, this investigation has arrived at a paradoxical outcome for those who object to my claim that Anselm has proven the existence of God in *Proslogion* III. Their motivation is to ensure that the God whose existence Anselm proves is the Trinitarian God in whom Anselm and all Christians believe. But insisting that that identity cannot be proven until *Proslogion* XXIII has the opposite consequence: on that interpretation, all of Anselm's inferences after *Proslogion* IV are invalid. I think that I have sufficiently shown that, on the contrary, all those inferences are valid only if, but only if, the God whose existence Anselm proves in *Proslogion* III is the Trinitarian God to whom he addresses his inference about the Trinity in *Proslogion* XXIII.

The logic of Anselm's proof shows that he does not need to demonstrate that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has *all* the properties which Christians believe that God has in order to prove that identity. All that is required is that it be demonstrated that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists and has *just one property* which is unique to God. Nothing more is required to demonstrate that identity.

This where the fundamental difference between Anselm's proof and the Cartesian proofs becomes most stark. In *Proslogion* III Anselm first proves that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist. Since whatever is other than the Creator of all other things can be thought not to exist, that entails that that which is true of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is true of God alone. But so that that conclusion is a proven truth, and not just a belief, that premise must be discharged in the course of the argument, as was shown in Chapter 8.

4 Discerning the Overall Plot of the *Proslogion*

Logan maintains that Anselm cannot establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is the God in whom Anselm believes until he has established that it has all the characteristics which Christian attribute to God. So he requires the syllogism [B] to establish the major premise of the syllogism [A], that:

> X is F (major premise), where F stands for "existent *in re*" or any attribute of God;

I have already shown how mistaken that requirement is. This is a clear example of how the issue of *where* Anselm established the existence of the God in whom Christians believe has been confused with the issue of the overall plot of the *Proslogion*.

In his review of Logan's *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, Bernd Goebel summarizes that claim as the proof that "God really exists and has all the great-making attributes". But he finds that interpretation "very awkward".[19]

> For it is to say that the truth of the first premise (P-1) "God is X" can only be ascertained by proving, amongst others, that "X really exists and has all great-making attributes". But this was supposed to be the second premise (P-2) of the syllogism which is Anselm's 'single argument'. Again, the supposed first premise is an identity claim, so that at any rate we do not have a classical syllogism. Rather than calling the proposition "God is X" a "premise" of the "syllogism" outlined by the author, we should, perhaps, say that it is a first conclusion of a quite different argument. Here it is:
>
> (P-1) X really (and necessarily) exists and has all great-making attributes;
> (P-2) Christians believe that God really (and necessarily) exists and has all great-making attributes;
> (C-1) Therefore, the God Christians believe in is X.
> (C-2) Therefore, the God Christians believe in really (and necessarily) exists and has all great-making attributes.

This is a more plausible construal of the overall argument of the *Proslogion* than Logan's because, construed this way, it is a *conclusion* that the God in whom Christians believe is X, not a premise. However, I find this construal also to be objectionable.

Any account of the overall plot of the *Proslogion* which interprets Anselm as having to prove that X has all the 'great-making attributes' before it can be identified as the God in whom Anselm and all Christians believe cannot be squared with the text, as I have argued in §11.3. That problem applies to Goebel's (P-1) as much as to Logan's [A]:2.

19 Goebel (2009), p. 15.

To repeat, it is a fact is that *none* of the conclusions which Anselm infers after *Proslogion* IV have X (i.e., something/that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought) as their subject. For in *Proslogion* V and thereafter, the subject of all Anselm's inferences is "You". The subject of those inferences is not even "God", although sometimes it is "You, Lord God". So the overall plot of the *Proslogion* cannot be either Logan's syllogism, or Goebel's 'quite different argument'.

When we survey the whole of the *Proslogion* from the vantage point afforded by our close examination of its first four chapters, its overall plot can be clearly discerned. To lay it out as an extended argument, this is how it goes:

(i)	Anselm has spoken of something than which nothing greater could be thought.	Fact verifiable in *Proslogion* II
(ii)	Because Anselm has spoken of something than which nothing greater could be thought, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding.	Deduced in the 1st half of *Proslogion* II
(iii)	Because something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in the understanding, it is necessary that it is also in reality.	Deduced in the second half of *Proslogion* II
(iv)	Because it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, it so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.	Deduced in the first half of *Proslogion* III
(v)	Because something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Deduced in the second half of *Proslogion* III
(vi)	Because You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought, You alone so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.	Deduced in the second half of *Proslogion* III
(vii)	Because You are that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, You are that which, the highest of all things, alone existing through Yourself, made all other things from nothing.	Deduced in *Proslogion* V
(viii)	Because You are the highest of all things, You are the Supreme Good, through whom every good exists.	Deduced in *Proslogion* V
(ix)	Because You are the Supreme Good, through whom every good exists, You are whatever it is better to be than not to be.	Deduced in *Proslogion* V
(x)	Because You are whatever it is better to be than not to be, You are whatever we believe about the divine substance.	Deduced in *Proslogion* VI–XXIII

In the cosmological reformulation presented in this book the inferences from (i) to (iv) have been replaced by the following three:

(i*)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.	Fact supported by modern cosmology
(ii*)	Because every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning, it is necessary both that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality and that it is unable not to exist.	Deduced in Chapter 4
(iii*)	Because it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.	Deduced in Chapter 6

The inferences (v) to (x) then follow from (iii*). So the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, which in the *Proslogion* consists of (i) to (vi) exhibits a very similar plot, but instead of beginning with (i) to (iii), it deduces (ii*) from (i*).

It can be seen that the overall plot of the *Proslogion* conforms closely to the ground-plan which Anselm laid out in the Preface when he described how the *unum argumentum* he hoped to discover would fulfil his six objectives.

5 Interpreting Anselm's *unum argumentum* as a Phrase

A second, quite different proposal is that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the phrase, "than which a greater cannot be thought", which he repeatedly deploys in deriving his arguments throughout the *Proslogion*. In an article published in 2007 Toivo Holopainen had explored the use of the word *argumentum* in the intellectual tradition which Anselm inherited, and had argued that it is the *term* "that than which a greater cannot be thought" which should be identified as Anselm's *unum argumentum*.[20] In a recent book, *A Historical Study of Anselm's Proslogion*, he has expanded his earlier article, discussing the issue in more detail, while advocating his earlier proposal.[21]

20 Toivo Holopainen, 'Anselm's Argumentum and the Early Medieval Theory of Argument', *Vivarium* 45 (2007), pp. 1–29.

21 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion.

In this book he explains that his case is based on a synchronized reading of three important passages: the Preface; *Reply* X; and *Reply* V, writing:

> these passages jointly support the idea that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' is the single argument, and they jointly make it difficult for any of the other alternatives to qualify as the single argument.[22]

I agree that these passages are what need to be closely examined in order to identify Anselm's *unum argumentum*.

5.1 *Examining Anselm's Reflections on His Proof in Reply X*

The passage in *Reply* X is the one which Holopainen considers to be the most important for identifying Anselm's *unum argumentum*.[23] For in this passage Anselm is reflecting on what he has been arguing in both the *Proslogion* and the *Reply*. So, let us examine how Holopainen interprets it as supporting his proposal.

This passage was cited in Chapter 8 in order to show that Anselm does take himself to have proven that God exists, but what is relevant here is the light it shines on the issue of Anselm's *unum argumentum*. Anselm writes in *Reply* X:

> *I think that I have demonstrated in the aforementioned little book, not by unsound but by necessary argumentation, that there exists in actual reality something than which nothing greater could be thought, and that* [this argumentation] *has not been undermined by any sound objection.*

I take Anselm to be commenting on the validity of his demonstration in the *Proslogion*. He then widens the perspective. Unfortunately Holopainen's translation of the next sentence omit significant words. For that reason, I shall first quote that sentence in Latin:

> *Tantum enim vim huius prolationis in se continent significatio; ut hoc ipsum quod dicitur, ex necessitate eo ipso, quod intelligitur vel cogitatur, et revera probetur existere et id ipsum esse quicquid de divina substantia oportet credere.*

22 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 58.
23 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 58.

Holopainen assists his case by translating that Latin sentence as:

> For the signification of this utterance ["something than which a greater cannot be thought"] contains in itself so much force that what is said is necessarily, by the mere fact that it is understood or thought of, proved both to exist in reality and to be whatever should be believed about the divine substance.[24]

That translation contains a significant omission. While Anselm begins by remarking on the force of this phrase, by omitting to translate *hoc ipsum* Holopainen makes it appear that Anselm is simply referring to the phrase rather than referring to *this thing itself* which that phrase signifies. That omission alters the sense of what Anselm is asserting so that it appears that Anselm is here emphasizing the significance of the phrase. Of course, that suits Holopainen's case, but while Anselm is certainly asserting that the utterance of that phrase has great force, what he is claiming is that it is "this thing itself ["*hoc ipsum*"] which is spoken of" which is necessarily proven both really to exist and to be whatever should be believed about the divine substance.

There is a second difficulty in Holopainen's translation of "*eo ipso*" as "by the mere fact that". Anselm is pointing out that not only is *this thing itself* proven to exist, but it is proven to be *that thing* itself which is whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance. Holopainen's translation of "*eo ipso*" alters the sense of the sentence so that it appears that the fact that the phrase is understood or thought is what enables Anselm's conclusions to be proven. But Anselm is here emphasizing that it is the fact that *that thing* which is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is identical to God which is so significant. That significance is not conveyed by this translation. For it is that identity which enables Anselm to prove that the thing itself which "is proven both really to exist and to be whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance".

Ian Logan translates this sentence differently, as:

> For the meaning of this phrase contains such force in itself that this very thing which is spoken of, which is of necessity understood and thought of by itself, is also proved to be that very thing, which is whatever it is necessary to believe about the divine substance.

24 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 35.

But that also contains a significant omission. Logan has not translated "*existere*"!

I also question the translation of "*continet*" as "contains". We saw in Chapter Nine that the verb "*continere*" has a much richer and stronger range of nuances than "contains". The sense of "*continet*" in this context is better expressed as "holds within itself". However, it is Holopainen's omitting to translate "*hoc ipsum*" and Logan's omitting to translate "*existere*" which are the most serious and significant flaws in those translations.

Commenting on this sentence,[25] Sigbjorn Sonnesyn agrees with Holopainen's translation of "*prolatio*" as "utterance" rather than as "phrase" (the word Logan uses), because "*prolatio*" comes from the verb "*proferre*" which means "to being forth", "to utter". However, he disagrees with how both Holopainen and Logan translate "*ex necessitate eo ipso, quod intelligitur vel cogitator*". He thinks that Holopainen's reading of "*eo ipso*" as "by the mere fact that" makes "*ipso*" carry more weight than it can reasonably be expected to bear.[26] He thinks it more likely that "*eo ipso*" is the antecedent of "*quod*".

In this passage, Anselm is drawing a threefold distinction between: (a) the phrase which has been uttered; (b) what that phrase signifies; and (c) the actual thing which is so described. Accordingly, taking Sonnesyn's comments into account, I translate this sentence as:

> *For the signification of this utterance holds within itself such force that this thing itself* [hoc ipsum] *which is spoken of, on account of the thing itself* [eo ipso] *which is understood or thought, by necessity is really proven to exist and to be that thing itself* [id ipsum] *which is whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance.*

Anselm characteristically writes the phrase "*id ipsum*" at critical points in his deductions when he wants to draw a sharp distinction between the words used to describe something, and the thing itself which is so described. For example,

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25 Personal email, 9 January 2021.

26 Williams, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, p. 133, similarly translates *eo ipso* as "from the mere fact that". I agree with Sigbjorn Sonnesyn's comments:

> His translation seems to read the force of "*eo quod*", as "for the reason that" or "because", with "*ipso*" as an intensifier. This is a very awkward construction in and of itself, and while Anselm's Latin is sometimes strained, it is always for good and intelligible reasons. There seems to be no good reason for Holopainen's awkwardness here, and his translation also misses what to me is an obvious parallel between "*hoc ipsum quod dicitur*" and "*id ipsum quod intelligitur*", and also "*id ipsum esse quod credere oportet*".

he invokes *id ipsum* in the contradiction he infers in Stage One and again in the contradiction he infers in Stage Two. In Stage One his point is that the thing itself would be *mis*-described as "that than which a greater cannot be thought" if it were indeed solely in the understanding, for it is not possible that it is not in reality. And in Stage Two similarly his point is that the thing itself would be *mis*-described as "that than which a greater cannot be thought" if it can indeed be thought not to exist. Anselm also twice invokes the distinction between the words which signify something and the thing itself which is so signified in *Proslogion* IV. He firstly uses that distinction to explain how in one way it was possible for the Fool to think what cannot be thought in another way, and secondly, when he reiterates his conclusions by writing:

> *Whoever properly understands this* [i.e., that than which a greater cannot be thought] *understands at least that this thing itself* [id ipsum] *so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist. Therefore whoever understands that God exists in the same way cannot think that He does not exist.*

I agree with Holopainen that in *Reply* X the phrase "whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance" is a deliberate echo of the sixth objective which Anselm prescribed that his *unum argumentum* would achieve. But what Anselm is saying is that "this thing" – that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – is *the very same thing* as is described by the beliefs which Christians attribute to God. It is *that identity* which enables him to infer "whatever it is proper to believe about the divine substance".

Thus I find that when this passage is translated without those omissions it does not provide the support for Holopainen's interpretation which he claims it does. It is also possible that Logan omitted to translate *existere* because of his insistence that Anselm only proves the existence of the God in whom he believes *after* he has established that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has whatever is believed about the divine substance.

On the contrary, I read this paragraph as emphasizing that it is proving the identity of God as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in *Proslogion* III which *enables* Anselm to prove that God exists, as well as to infer the other beliefs which he does in the rest of the *Proslogion*.

5.2 *Identifying in Reply V What an argumentum Is*

The other passage in which Holopainen finds support for his proposal is in *Reply* V. He says that this passage "plays a crucial role in the effort to find

out what exactly is the entity that Anselm calls *unum argumentum*",[27] for "it explains how the single argument will 'need no other [argument] for proving itself than itself alone'".[28]

In *Reply* V Anselm resumes his response to Gaunilo's parody to add further rebuttals to the three put forward in *Reply* III. In Chapter 7 they were found to be justified and effective. Anselm objects to Gaunilo's substituting the phrase "greater than everything" [*maius omnibus*] in lieu of the phrase Anselm uses, "that than which a greater cannot be thought". His objection is that that substitution destroys the validity of his argumentation. It was shown in §7.4 that he was right. Instead of validly deducing that "That which is more excellent than all [other] truly exists somewhere in reality", Gaunilo has inadvertently proven that the Lost Island is not an island more excellent than all other lands.

Early in *Reply* V Anselm addresses Gaunilo directly, writing:

> *Firstly, you often repeat that I say that that which is greater than everything is in the understanding, and if it is in the understanding, it is also in reality, for otherwise what is greater than everything would not be greater than everything. Such a proof cannot be found anywhere in all of my statements. For "greater than everything" and "that than which a greater cannot be thought" do not have the same force for proving that what is said is in reality*.

As Holopainen comments, "the difference, as will become apparent, is that one needs another argument for its support, whereas the other does not".[29] The word "*argumentum*" occurs twice in this passage.

Since this thought-experiment is the context in which Anselm uses the word "*argumentum*", we need first to tease out what Anselm himself is arguing in this passage before evaluating Holopainen's proposal. For Anselm's critique of Gaunilo's phrase, "that which is greater than everything" is often quite cryptic. It begins with his writing:

> (A) *For what if someone were to say that something exists which is greater than everything which exists, and yet that that thing itself can be thought not to exist and that something greater than it could still be thought, even if it does not exist*?[30]

27 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 28.
28 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 59.
29 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 61.
30 I am labelling the various sentences quoted from *Reply* V as "(A)", "(B)", "(C)", etc. to make it easy to refer back to them.

Anselm asks this question because he is aware that when Gaunilo was composing his parody, he left out the crucial operator "It can be thought that", and so the case he presents about the Lost Island fails to be an effective parody. It was shown in §7.4 that when Gaunilo's parody is amended so that its inferences mimic Anselm's more closely while still deploying his counter-example, it comes to a shuddering halt at the point where Anselm validly deduces a contradiction.

When Anselm asks that question he too is investigating what happens when Gaunilo's parody is amended in that way. So, Anselm is generously supposing that someone is trying to rectify that mistake, and putting forward two suppositions. The first is that something which is greater than everything [else] exists but can be thought not to exist. That is, he is supposing that someone has accepted the conclusion of Gaunilo's parody – something exists which is greater than everything [else] which exists – but has recognized that, because the story of the Lost Island says that it no longer exists, it can be thought not to exist. The second supposition is that even if it does not exist – which is what the story says is the case with the Lost Island – it could still be thought that something is greater than it.

In *Proslogion* II, Anselm argues that if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought is *solely* in the understanding – that is, it is in the understanding but not in reality – it *can be thought* that it is in reality. But if it can be thought that it is in reality, it can be thought that it is greater than if it were not in reality. So he asks:

> (B) *Can it be as clearly inferred that therefore it is not greater than all those things which exist as it was most openly articulated there* [i.e., in the *Proslogion*] *that therefore it is not* [something] *than which a greater cannot be thought*?

Anselm is comparing the case outlined in (A) with what he inferred in *Proslogion* II. For he had inferred there that if it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, then that thing itself [*id ipsum*] than which a greater *cannot* be thought is something than which a greater *can* be thought. So it is *not* something than which a greater cannot be thought. He is asking in (B) whether a contradiction can validly be inferred in the case of (A) similar to the one inferred in *Proslogion* II.

I can understand that some readers might protest at my discussing this passage because it looks like he is just splitting hairs. But, contrary to what has been falsely alleged by those commentators cited in Chapter 7, Anselm is taking Gaunilo's parody very seriously indeed. His three responses in *Reply* III

drew upon the considerations which relate to what he had established in Stage Two of his proof. Since one of the problems with Gaunilo's parody is that it does not closely mimic Anselm's Stage One argument, he is about to explore here what happens if Gaunilo's parody is corrected so that it does properly mimic his own by including the operator "It can be thought that …". Exploring whether Gaunilo's parody is effective once it is amended in that way is not just splitting hairs.

Anselm has recognized that a positive answer to the question in (B) is possible only if some 'other *argumentum'* were to be invoked:

> (C) *For that* [i.e., the case described in (A)] *is in need of an* argumentum *other than what is said* [to be] *greater than everything. However in this* [i.e., in the inference in *Proslogion* 11] *there is no need for another than this itself which is spoken of as* [that] *than which a greater cannot be thought.*

We saw in §7.4 that a contradiction like the one in *Proslogion* 11 cannot be validly inferred when Gaunilo's phrase is substituted in lieu of Anselm's phrase. Some other *argumentum* is required to make that inference possible. Anselm infers from (C) that:

> (D) *Therefore, since it is not possible to prove in the same way about that which is said to be greater than everything what* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought proves about itself through itself* [de se per seipsum probat], *you have unjustly accused me for having said what I did not say, since it differs so much from what I did say.*

Anselm has effectively shown why Gaunilo's accusation is unjust.

It seems that when Anselm says in (D) that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought "proves about itself through itself", he is alluding to his stipulation in the Preface that the *unum argumentum* which he was hoping to discover would "need no other than itself to prove itself". Anselm continues:

> (E) *If, however, after another* argumentum [is provided], *it is possible, you ought not to have so rebuked me for saying what can be proven. On the other hand, whether it could is easily apprehended by* [anyone] *who recognizes that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could* [do] *this. For in no way can* [that]*-than-which-a-greater-could-not-be-thought be understood unless it is that which alone is greater than everything* [else].

I understand Anselm to be saying in this rather cryptic sentence that if by introducing some additional *argumentum* it becomes possible to prove that "That which is greater than everything [else] is *not* that which is greater than everything [else]", then the inference in question would indeed be parallel to the one Anselm himself presented in *Proslogion* II. So, he puts it to Gaunilo that, if adopting an additional premise makes it possible to deduce that contradiction, he ought not to have rebuked Anselm for proving a conclusion which Gaunilo had allegedly shown to be invalid.

He then comments that anyone who recognizes how in the case of that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, that contradiction could validly be deduced, would easily apprehend how the dubious inference could be repaired quite easily. That additional *argumentum* would enable the contradiction that "That which is greater than everything [else] is not that which is greater than everything [else]" to be validly deduced. Here, near the end of the passage, Anselm reveals what that additional *argumentum* would have to be, writing "For in no way can [that]-than-which-a-greater-could-not-be-thought be understood unless it is that which alone is greater than everything [else]". Anselm concludes his discussion by writing:

> (F) *Therefore, just as* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is understood and is in the understanding, and for that reason is asserted by truth to be in reality, so what is said to be greater than everything is understood and is in the understanding and on that account is inferred necessarily to be in reality itself.*

So, given the last sentence of (E], it follows that what is said to be greater than everything [else] necessarily exists in reality.

Asserting that "the discussion in *Responsio* 5 is of critical importance for the identification of Anselm's single argument", Holopainen makes three comments on this passage:

> First, the passage makes it clear that Anselm is willing to apply the term 'argument' (*argumentum*) to entities like 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' or 'greater than all'.[31]

Since in this passage Anselm is contrasting the efficacy of those two different phrases, Holopainen's comment seems at first sight to be reasonable. Read that way, it does appear to provide strong support for his proposal that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the phrase, "that than which a greater cannot be thought".

31 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 63.

However, I interpret Anselm's reasoning differently. What *is* immediately clear from (C) is that the 'other *argumentum*' is neither of those phrases. But at this point Anselm does not tell his readers what the 'other *argumentum*' needed by the first inference he mentions in (C) could be. Nevertheless, whatever it could be, it would have to be something which would entail that that which is greater than everything [else] is *not* greater than everything [else].

Probing what Anselm has already argued, it turns out that there is only one candidate which could be that 'other *argumentum*'. It has been demonstrated in Chapter 7 that Anselm was quite right to respond to Gaunilo's parody by pointing out that his Stage One argument is unique. For Anselm has demonstrated in Stage Two of his proof that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist, and it has been demonstrated in Chapter 10 that:

> (10:32) It is necessary that *only* that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.

So, if the case described in (A) is validly to entail a contradiction similar to the contradiction which Anselm has inferred in *Proslogion* 11, what it needs could not be anything other than the last sentence which Anselm wrote in (E):

> (AA) *In no way can* [that]*-than-which-a-greater-could-not-be-thought be understood unless it is that which alone is greater than everything* [else].[32]

Once (AA) is added to the inference in question, it would clearly follow that that which is greater than everything [else] is *not* that which is greater than everything [else]. Since (AA) converts Gaunilo's phrase into Anselm's own, the validity of that inference has been shown in Stage One. Since nothing other than (AA) could provide what is needed for that contradiction to be validly inferred, the "other *argumentum*" could not be anything other than (AA).

Holopainen's second comment refers to the sentence (D):

> Second, even though Anselm does not use the exact formulation in *Responsio* 5 that he used in the preface, it is clear that here he comments on what it means that the single argument 'would need no other [argument] for proving itself than itself alone'.

32 I label this sentence "(AA)" as an abbreviation for "*aliud argumentum*".

I agree that when Anselm describes something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in *Reply* V as "proving about itself through itself", he is alluding to what he had written in the Preface. This is the closest Anselm ever comes to referring to the phrase "*that than which a greater cannot be thought*" as his *unum argumentum*. The predicate "proves about itself through itself" is certainly similar to the predicate "would need no other [*argumentum*] for proving itself than itself alone". But it is too quick to infer from that similarity that the phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought" is Anselm's *unum argumentum*. If this passage is to be understood properly, the wider context must be taken into account.

Gaunilo presented his parody as a counter-example to show that the argument in *Proslogion* II is invalid because a parallel argument infers a false conclusion from true premises. So, while Anselm's three responses in *Reply* III are focussed on reinforcing Stage Two of his proof, as was shown in Chapter 7, it is appropriate that in *Reply* V he returns to provide a further response focussed on Stage One. He shows in Stage One how its conclusion is deduced from what the phrase itself means. That the existence of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is proven "about itself through itself" is the essential first stage of his three-stage argument. For it could only be the case that his *unum argumentum* "would need no other [*argumentum*] for proving itself than itself alone" if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is proven "about itself through itself". I submit that that is the point which Anselm is making when he writes the sentence (D).

Holopainen reads the sentence [D] differently. He comments:

> Third, *Responsio* 5 not only elucidates what the requirement in the preface means, but it also makes it clear that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' is an argument that 'need[s] no other [argument] for proving itself than itself alone'.

My assessment is that when what Anselm has said in (D) is appraised in the context of his thought-experiment, this whole passage provides conclusive evidence of the very opposite. For what becomes clear is that when Anselm says that the inference he has supposed "needs an *argumentum* other than what is said [to be] greater than everything", the only thing which could fulfil that need is the proposition (AA).

It is for that reason that Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson were right to note that when the first sentence in (D) is translated literally, it says that what is needed is "a *premise* other than the fact that [this being] is called

greater than all others".[33] Similarly, Thomas Williams translated this same clause as: "In the second case we would need *another premise*, besides the fact that this being is said to be 'greater than everything else'".[34]

Their translating "*alio indiget argumento*" as "in need of a *premise* other than …" is undoubtedly an interpretative translation, but both Hopkins & Richardson and Williams are right to recognize that the *aliud argumentum* which Anselm says is needed would have to be a *proposition* which could function as an additional premise.

Likewise, when Anselm says in (E) that if by introducing some additional *argumentum* it becomes possible to prove the same conclusions as what something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought proves, Gaunilo should not have rebuked him for saying what can be proven. For indeed, adopting the proposition (AA) would enable that which is greater than everything [else] to prove those same conclusions. What Anselm is arguing here confirms what I have argued above. For what he asserts in the last sentence of [E] is the proposition (AA).

Anselm has demonstrated that it can validly be deduced that what is said to be greater than everything [else] necessarily exists in reality, *provided* that it is understood that [that]-than-which-a-greater-could-not-be-thought is that which alone is greater than everything [else].

Holopainen has a different interpretation of the conclusion (F), writing:

> In this passage, Anselm suggests that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' can be used *as an argument* to prove that the greater than all exists in reality. Using the *reductio* technique, it is easy to prove that that than which a greater cannot be thought is the greater than all, and therefore the conclusions which apply to the former also apply to the latter.[35]

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33 Hopkins & Richardson, in *Anselm of Canterbury*, Vol. One, at p. 159.

34 Williams, *Anselm: Basic Writings*, p. 110 (my italics).

35 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 63 (my italics). In an attached footnote he comments:

> Anselm's analysis of the situation is not satisfactory. True enough, if it can be proved that (the thing called) 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot be any other than (the thing called) 'greater than all', it generally follows that what applies to the former also applies to the latter. However, such an inference need not be valid in intentional contexts. For example, if someone understands (the phrase or the notion) 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', it does not follow that he must therefore understand (the phrase or the notion) 'greater than all'.

That comment is correct. It is not valid to infer that someone who understands the first phrase thereby understands the second. I point out, however, that because the cosmological reformulation of Stage One does not involve the understanding it can validly be

He takes Anselm's analysis to show that Anselm means the phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought" to be the 'other argument' which the inference from (A) needs. But that is not what the argument which Anslem has advanced in writing the passage from (A) to (F) shows.

Although the passage in *Reply* v is all about the difference in the efficacy of Anselm's and Gaunilo's phrases, what proves to be decisive in identifying his *unum argumentum* is his claim that the latter is unable to prove the same consequence as can be validly deduced using Anselm's phase unless it is supplemented by another *proposition*. It makes no sense to say that what Gaunilo has written stands in need of another *phrase* if it is to prove that same consequence: that what is greater than everything else is in reality. What Gaunilo needs for that conclusion to be validly deduced is a *proposition* which can function as a premise.

Furthermore, Holopainen does not explain how the phrase which he identifies as Anselm's *unum argumentum* "demonstrates alone that God truly exists" as Anselm stipulated that his *unum argumentum* would, for that phrase does not mention God. Holopainen quotes that second objective four times, but never attempts to show how it is satisfied.

I find that the passages which Holopainen cites in support of his proposal in fact indicate that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is a proposition, not a phrase, and that it has not been demonstrated how his preferred phrase satisfies the criterion (b): that God truly exists.

6 Interpreting Anselm's *unum argumentum* as a Proposition

It was noted in §11.1 above that Bernd Goebel reports that the usage of the term "*argumentum*" in the early middle ages is so equivocal that the evidence can serve to justify almost any reasonable interpretation of the phrase *unum argumentum* whatsoever.

In his review of Logan's *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, Goebel objects that "a syllogism does not seem to be the right class of entity to be capable of a proof". He is right. The only sense in which it makes some sense to say that a syllogism 'proves itself' is that all valid syllogisms *show* their validity. Valid syllogisms can *present* proofs, but what a valid syllogism proves is its *conclusion*, that is, a proposition.

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inferred in that reformulation from its having been proven in Chapter 4 that something than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality, that that is true of that which is greater than everything [else].

That accords with what has emerged from the examination of the passage in *Reply* v. Anselm is using the word "*argumentum*" to refer to a proposition which can serve as a premise. That makes sense, because proofs consist of a series of propositions in which certain premises are shown to entail certain conclusion(s). So, when Goebel proposes that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is a proposition, it is both a more faithful and a more plausible proposal than the other two considered above. Goebel's announces his proposal by writing:

> In the light of what I have said about the overall argument of the *Proslogion*, my surmise is that Anselm is referring to the proposition "God is X" (C-1) as the *unum argumentum*.[36]

He claims that that proposition certainly meets the criterion that it would "prove itself", and would establish that God truly exists and that He is such that as Christian belief has it. And he asserts that a case can be made that it also brings about the first criterion and, therefore, the second, all by itself. But it was beyond the scope of that review to justify those claims.

I have objected in §11.4 to Goebel's construal of the overall argument of the *Proslogion,* but those objections do not apply to his surmise. For as soon as I read his review of Logan's book, I immediately recognized that he had discerned a plausible answer to the question: What is Anselm's *unum argumentum*? My assessment is that the case for Goebel's surmise is stronger than could be inferred from his own construal of the overall plot of the *Proslogion*, as I shall show.

It was appropriate for Goebel to present his surmise as "God is X", because he was reviewing Logan's analysis of Anselm's *unum argumentum*, which employed Logan's abbreviation "X". Because "X" is ambiguous, this is not very satisfactory. However, it is clear enough what Goebel is recommending. He is proposing that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the proposition that "God is that [or: something] than which a greater cannot be thought".[37]

Although Goebel does not mention it, his proposal is supported by a definition of the word "*argumentum*" which Holopainen reports, but chooses not to adopt. For Boethius endorses the following definition he read in Cicero's *Topica*:

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36 Goebel (2009), p. 17.

37 I have had to add "something" in brackets because Logan confusedly uses "X" to refer both to *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought and to *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

> *Argumentum autem rationem, quae ratio rei dubiae faciat fidem.*[38]
>
> An argument, however, is a reason which would produce belief regarding a thing in doubt.

In his *Commentary on Cicero's Topics*, Boethius adopts that definition word-for-word. Toivo Holopainen has commented on this definition that:

> As Boethius construed this definition, the central expression in it is 'thing in doubt' (*res dubia*), which he understood as a technical term. Boethius starts from the assumption that arguments are produced for the purpose of solving 'questions'. 'Question' (*quaestio*) is also here a technical term, and it is defined as 'a proposition in doubt'.[39]

Holopainen explains that, for Boethius, not all interrogative sentences are questions in this sense. The relevant questions are those where what is in doubt is a matter of fact. Curiously, Boethius claims that a question contains both an affirmation and a negation, which is a contradiction. But what he means is that any factual question has two possible answers: either "*p*" or "not-*p*". Holopainen quotes Boethius as writing:

> The whole purpose of an argument is directed towards a question, that is, towards a proposition that is in doubt – not in order to prove the whole question but rather to corroborate by reason a part of it.... One person maintains the part that is an affirmation and another person the part that is a negation, and each person seeks whatever arguments he can find, the first for demonstrating (*ad astruendam*) the affirmation and the second for its destruction (*ad destruendam*).[40]

This passage occurs in the same context as the definition which Boethius quotes from Cicero. It is significant that in the passage from the Preface quoted at the beginning of this chapter Anselm uses Boethius' technical term: *ad astruendum*. That strengthens the case for reading Anselm as having Cicero's definition in mind when he writes the word "*argumentum*" in the Preface.

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38 Cicero, *Topica* 2, 8, ed. Friedrich, 426c. Boethius adopts that definition in *In Ciceronis Topica* 1 2,7. Both passages are quoted by Holopainen both in his 2007 article on p. 12, and in his recent book on p. 75.

39 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 75.

40 Boethius, *In Ciceronis Topica* 1, [2, 7–2, 8], ed. Orelli and Baiter, 277–78.

Holopainen goes on to suggest that Boethius' characterization of the term "*argumentatio*" [argumentation] provides a possible way of understanding what kind of thing an *argumentum* is:

> [Boethius] explains that an argument will not be able to produce belief regarding something unless it is expressed by means of propositions, and "[t]he expression and arrangement of an argument by means of propositions is called 'argumentation' [*argumentatio*]".[41]

That says clearly that, for Boethius, an *argumentum* is a reason which must be expressed as a proposition if it is to produce belief regarding a doubtful matter. That definition implies that an *argumentum* is a justified proposition – or at least, a justifiable proposition – for only they express reasons which could produce belief.

Despite those illuminating comments, Holopainen asks:

> What kind of entity should we assume an 'argument' to be? The definition of 'argument' is not very helpful in this respect: all it says is that an argument is 'a reason' [*ratio*].[42]

It is not surprising that he did not find this definition very helpful, since it does not support his proposal that Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought". But I do. That Anselm is using the word "*argumentum*" in this sense is what was revealed by the examination in §11.5.2 of the passage in *Reply* v where he argues that Gaunilo's counter-argument needs another *argumentum*. Despite finding that that passage indicates that for Anselm an *argumentum* is a proposition, not a phrase, I acknowledge that Holopainen has made a very helpful contribution to resolving this issue by his extensive review of the usage of that word in the literature Anselm would have read.

7 Identifying Anselm's *unum argumentum*

In the whole of the *Proslogion* and the *Reply* Anselm uses the word "*argumentum*" only five times: twice in the Preface to the *Proslogion*; once in *Reply* i; and

41 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 76, quoting Boethius, *In Ciceronis Topica* i, [2, 7–2, 8], p. 35.

42 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 76.

twice in *Reply* V examined in §11.5.2. We already have seen that in *Reply* V both those occurrences of the words "*aliud argumentum*" refer to another proposition which could serve as a premise. That exemplifies Cicero's definition perfectly.

Anselm's use of "*argumentum*" in *Reply* I can also be understood as employing Cicero's definition. After summarizing Gaunilo's objection to his Stage One argument, Anselm challenges Gaunilo by writing:

> *If* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not understood or thought, nor is in the understanding or in thought, then either God is not* [something]*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, or He is not understood or though, and is not in the understanding or in thought. I make use of your belief and conscience as the most powerful* argumentum *that this is false*.

Anselm is appealing to Gaunilo's belief and conscience as providing him with quite enough 'reason' to acknowledge the falsity of the consequence Anselm has inferred. That Anselm is using the word "*argumentum*" with Cicero's definition in mind makes perfect sense of this challenge to Gaunilo. And, of course, what is required to reject the consequent of Anselm's implication and affirm its antecedent – which is Anselm's own position – is for that reason to be expressed in a proposition.

That is why I have translated "*argumentum*" as "reason" when quoting Anselm's Preface. That translation makes more sense than translating that Latin word as "argument", as most translators do. Anselm is telling his readers that he became dissatisfied with what he had written in the *Monologion* because it was "*constructed by a linking together of many reasons*". That makes much more sense than if he was dissatisfied with its being constructed by linking together many *arguments*, because he also links many arguments together in the *Proslogion*. That is evident in the display of the overall plot of the *Proslogion* in §11.4 as an extended hypothetical syllogism.

It therefore is reasonable to interpret Anselm's use of "*unum argumentum*" in the Preface of the *Proslogion* as meaning a 'single reason', as Cicero's definition suggests. That also accords with Bernd Goebels's surmise that it is the proposition: "God is X". I commented in §11.7 that the case for that surmise is stronger than his own presentation of it. It is now time to explain why that is my assessment.

Since I agree with Goebel that the only way to settle the contentious issue of what is Anselm's *unum argumentum* is to take the criteria he lists in the

Preface seriously, a good place to start is to ask: What does Anselm mean by saying that his *unum argumentum* "would need no other to prove itself than itself alone"?

It was noted in §11.7 that Goebel submits his own proposal in the light of what his understanding of the overall argument of the *Proslogion*. I have objected in §11.4 to his reconstruction of the overall plot of the *Proslogion* because it misrepresents the logic of Anselm's argumentation. The only way in which Anselm establishes that "X has all great-making attributes" is by establishing that *God* has all the 'great-making attributes' and that *God* is identical to X.

One thing is clear: by 'proving itself' Anselm *could not* be meaning an inference of the form: "*p*", therefore "*p*"! That is much too trivial to be called a proof. But if not that, then what? It is also clear that since Anselm has said that it "would need no other *argumentum* to demonstrate that God really exists", it must occur somewhere in either *Proslogion* II or III, for Anselm proves the existence of God in the second half of *Proslogion* III.

I submit that what Anselm means when he says that his *unum argumentum* "would need no other to prove itself than itself alone" makes perfect sense when it is understood that he proves that God truly exists by means of the three-stage proof I have discerned in *Proslogion* II and III. For when the text of *Proslogion* II is read carefully, the sentence which is standardly taken to be the premise of his proof expresses a belief which Anselm does not yet understand, and the logical form of that belief makes it quite unsuitable to serve as a premise. That sentence says:

> (B) And indeed, *we* believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.

We have seen that the belief which Anselm has introduced is in doubt, because the Fool's denial has led him to ask: "Is there not anything of such a nature?" So in that regard it conforms to Cicero's definition. Indeed, its being in doubt is one of a number of reasons why the belief expressed in the sentence (B) is quite unsuitable to serve as the first premise of his proof. Instead, Stage One begins with:

> *But surely this same fool, when he hears the very thing which I have spoken of: something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it exists.*

Manifestly, Anselm has extracted the indefinite description "*something than which nothing greater could be thought*" from (B) and weakened it so that it becomes "*something than which nothing greater can be thought*". The latter is what he says the Fool hears. Once he has established some common ground with the Fool, he alters that phrase yet again to an equivalent expression: "*something than which a greater cannot be thought*". That last phrase is what appears as the subject of the conclusion of Stage One. As Anselm said in *Reply* v, the phrase "*something than which a greater cannot be thought*" has proven those conclusions "about itself through itself", for all that is needed to deduce it validly is a plausible definition of "greater than" and the premise "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good" both of which are implicit in that phrase itself.

He then establishes, in Stage Two of his proof that this same 'something' so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist. Since that conclusion is entailed by the same premises as entail the conclusion of Stage One, his Stage Two conclusion has been proven without introducing any other *argumentum*.

Anselm then extracts the pronoun "*You*" from the sentence (B) to formulate the two propositions from which he deduces the conclusions of Stage Three. While I have been calling those two propositions "reasons", I submit that they are not additional *argumenta*, because both are implied by what Anselm believes God to be: the Creator of all other things. Those two reasons simply articulate what is implicit in his use of the pronoun "You".

In Chapter 8 it was demonstrated that it follows from those two premises and the conclusion of Stage Two that:

(8:40) It is necessary that You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.

That proposition is *precisely equivalent* to "You alone are something than which nothing greater could be thought", which was the belief which Anselm did not understand when he uttered the sentence (B). That proposition has needed no other to prove itself than itself alone, since the two premises involved in the deduction of Stages One and Two are implicit in the description "something than which nothing greater could be thought", and the two reasons introduced in Stage Three are both implicit in his use of the pronoun "You". It then follows immediately from the conclusion of Stage Two and (8:40) that:

(8:41) It is necessary that You, Lord our God, alone so truly exist that You cannot be thought not to exist.

So, the proposition which has needed no other to prove itself than itself alone has also demonstrated alone that God truly exists, thereby satisfying the criterion (b).

It might be objected that (8:41) has not been proven from (8:40) alone because it needed the conclusion of Stage Two as an additional *argumentum*. But since the subject of the conclusion of Stage Two is "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" that thing has also been proven the conclusion of Stage Two "about itself through itself", for it is entailed by the same premises as entail the conclusion of Stage One. So, this objection cannot be sustained.

Because the subject of Goebel's surmise is the noun "God" – not the pronoun "You" – his proposal is almost, but not quite, right. It must be amended because otherwise it is not a proposition which fulfils Anselm's criteria exactly. As I have repeatedly maintained, it is essential that the interpretation of Anselm's proof respects and preserves his couching it in second-person discourse. With that amendment, I submit, to paraphrase how Goebel introduced his proposal:

> In the light of what I have said about the overall argument of the *Proslogion* – including how and where Anselm proves that God truly exists – my surmise is that Anselm is referring to the proposition "You are something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought" as his *unum argumentum*.

Thereby I am endorsing Goebel's surmise in an amended form. For I have demonstrated that the proposition which satisfies the first two of Anselm's six criteria is:

> (UA) *You are something than which nothing greater could be thought.*[43]

It might be thought that by insisting that the subject of that proposition is the pronoun "You" I am just being pedantic about being faithful to the text. Although we have seen how badly Anselm's argument had been misrepresented by those who do not bother to read the text at all carefully, that is not the reason why I insist that the subject of Anselm's *unum argumentum* is the pronoun "You".

I am insisting that Anselm's *unum argumentum* be expressed as (UA) because that proposition conveys logical commitments which its transposition into the objective mode of third-person discourse does not. For Anselm has done more than establish that God alone is something than which a greater cannot be

43 I label this sentence "(UA)" as an abbreviation for "*unum argumentum*".

thought. He has also established that conclusion is true of "*You, Lord our God*". Anselm's use of "*our* God" in his first conclusion, and "*my* God" in his second conclusion expresses his own personal commitment to the God described in the Nicene Creed, as I have argued above. And by using "*You*", he expresses that commitment. Both those commitments are absent from the corresponding third-person propositions.

Not that Anselm is averse to expressing that proposition using third-person grammar; he does so in *Proslogion* IV. But when his *unum argumentum* is said to be the proposition, "God is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought", what precisely is signified by the use of the word "God" is not so clear. That unclarity is what opens the door to the objection that what Anselm asserts in *Proslogion* III is compatible with gods other than the Trinitarian God in whom Anselm and all Christians believe. But when his *unum argumentum* is recognized to be the proposition (UA), there is nothing indefinite about whom he is so identifying. The God whom Anselm is addressing is the God who is described in the Nicene Creed, because the first clause of that creed is what justifies his Stage Three premises.

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I here reemphasize what I have always insisted: that neither the sentence (B), nor the belief expressed in (B) serves *as a premise* in Anselm's proof. The proof of (8:40) does not begin with either the sentence (B), nor the belief expressed in (B). The sentence (B) is the *source* from which Anselm extracts those two referring phrases, but it does not serve as a *premise*.

8 Confirming the Identification of Anselm's *unum argumentum*

I have shown that the first two objectives which Anselm stipulated that his *unum argumentum* would satisfy are fulfilled by the three-stage proof of the existence of God which he presents in *Proslogion* II and III. The next three are all fulfilled in *Proslogion* V, although in a different order from the list in the Preface.

It was noted in §11.3 above that Anselm begins *Proslogion* V by asking:

> *What therefore are You, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought?*

That is a curious question. However, it would be a misreading to interpret that question as expressing doubt about the proof Anselm has just completed. He could hardly have meant that, since he has spent three chapters establishing

that identity, and has just asked his question by describing "You, Lord God" as "*than whom nothing greater can be thought*". That question clearly presupposes the proposition (UA). Since our current concern is with confirming that (UA) is his *unum argumentum*, I will adjourn discussing why he asks that question to §11.9.

I have already drawn attention to the fact that neither "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" nor "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" is the subject of any proposition which Anselm writes after *Proslogion* IV. Rather, in the rest of the *Proslogion* he uses the description "than which a greater cannot be thought" without attaching it either to "something" or to "that". It is not difficult to understand why he does that. Having established (UA) in *Proslogion* III, thereafter he can address God as "You" with the following thought in mind:

(1) The description "than which nothing greater can be thought" is true of You alone.

(1) explains why Anselm never mentions either "Something-than-which-..." or "That-than-which-..." in the rest of the *Proslogion*, and in many places in the *Reply* uses the expression, "than which a greater cannot be thought" without attaching it to any noun or pronoun.

Anselm answers the question he has asked with another rhetorical question:

> *What are You, if not that which, the highest of all* [summum omnium]*, alone existing through itself, made all other things from nothing? For whatever is not this, is less than can be thought. But this cannot be thought about You.*

It follows directly from (1) that:

(2) You are the highest of all.

He has already deduced in *Proslogion* III that "You have being most truly of all and most greatly of all". So inferring (2) from (1) simply repeats that deduction in other words.

Because God is the highest of all, Anselm immediately infers God could not possibly need any other thing in order to exist, for if He does, he would be less than the highest. It follows therefore that:

(3) You alone exist through Yourself [*per se*].

This inference is also sound, and is entailed by (1). Since (1) entails the truth of (3), it has been shown that (UA), in its equivalent form (1), satisfies the criterion (d) which his *unum argumentum* would suffice to establish that God needs nothing else in order to exist. It follows from (3) that:

(4) Whatever exists, but is other than You, has been made to exist by something else.

In the light of that, Anselm asserts that:

(5) Whatever is not the maker of all things from nothing is less than can be thought.

He can assert that because he has already in Stage Three pointed out that "If some mind could think of something better than You", whom he presupposes to be the Creator of all other things, absurdities would follow. So it is not possible to think of anything better than the Creator of all other things. It follows from (1) and (5), by *modus tollens*, that:

(6) Nothing other than You could be the maker of all things from nothing.

It now follows from (4) and (6) that:

(7) You are the maker of all other things from nothing.

Since Anselm has now established (7), it follows from (4) and (7) that:

(8) You are that whom all other things need so that they might exist and might exist well.

Although (8) satisfies the criterion (e) which Anselm prescribed that his *unum argumentum* would do, and is implied by (UA) and (4), he does not assert (8) in *Proslogion* V. However he writes at the end of *Proslogion* XXII that:

> *Nevertheless, you are nothing other than the one and supreme good, entirely sufficient unto yourself, needing nothing whom all things need that they might exist and exist well.*

The wording of the last clause in this claim is the same as the wording of criterion (e). Toivo Holopainen observes that "there is no argument for this claim"

in *Proslogion* XXII, for Anselm is "only rounding up his discussion about the 'divine substance'".[44] But then, Anselm did not need to justify the claim in *Proslogion* XXII, because it is the same as (8) which is entailed by (4) and (7) which he had deduced in *Proslogion* V from (1), which is equivalent to (UA). So it has been demonstrated that (UA) satisfies the criterion (e).

Anselm has yet to address the criterion (c): that God is the Supreme Good. That is the next objective Anselm addresses in *Proslogion* V. However, instead of presenting an argument to demonstrate that God is the Supreme Good, all he writes is another rhetorical question:

> *What good, then, is absent from the Supreme Good, through which every good exists?*

To ask what is absent from the Supreme Good is, no doubt, a reference back to the way he had argued that God exists *per se* and is the Creator. He had asserted on line (5) that, "Whatever is not this [i.e., Whatever is not the maker of all other things from nothing] is less than can be thought". I suggest that the underlying argument goes as follows. It follows from (1) and (5), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(9) Whatever is not the maker of all other things from nothing is not as great as You, than whom a greater cannot be thought.

It is a necessary truth that:

(10) Whatever is not as great as that than which a greater cannot be thought lacks some good.

It follows from (9) and (10), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(11) Whatever is not the maker of all other things from nothing lacks some good.

It is also a necessary truth that:

(12) It is not possible that whatever lacks some good is the Supreme Good.

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44 Holopainen, *A Historical Study of Anselm's* Proslogion, p. 32.

It follows from (11) and (12), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(13) Whatever is not the maker of all other things from nothing cannot be the Supreme Good.

(13) is equivalent to:

(14) Only that which is the maker of all other things from nothing can be the Supreme Good.

So, it follows from (7) and (14), by *modus ponens*, that:

(15) You, than whom a greater cannot be thought, are the Supreme Good.

That argument is valid. The comment which Anselm adds to his question – "through which every good exists" – simply reiterates what he had argued at length in the *Monologion*. Deducing the conclusion (14) demonstrates that the proposition (1), which is equivalent to (UA), satisfies the criterion (c) which the *unum argumentum* would have to demonstrate.

As for the criterion (f), Anselm generalizes the conclusion (14) so that it applies to all the other characteristics which are standardly attributed to God, writing:

> *You are accordingly just, truthful, blessed and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is indeed better to be just than not just, blessed than not blessed.*

That is, Anselm has inferred from (15), by Universal Generalization, that:

(16) You are whatever it is better to be than not to be.

The scope of (16) is extraordinarily wide. Taken literally, it cannot be true, for it would justify ascribing to God all sorts of attributes which are quite inappropriate. It is better to be well-fed rather than hungry; it is better to sleep well than to be an insomniac; it is better to exercise from time to time rather than spend all day every day sitting at a computer! It is easy enough to justify these everyday comparisons because we have evidence of what enables us to flourish, and what is bad for our health. They are true for us human beings, but none of them could be true of God.

To avoid those absurdities, Anselm needs some principled way of restricting the scope of this all-encompassing universal to those attributes which it would be better *for God* to have than not to have. Applying such a principle would require applying some prior criterion by which to identify what may be predicated of God substantially, and it would be that prior criterion which would identify the appropriate predicates. I pointed out in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments* that if Anselm were claiming to know such a criterion, that would be inconsistent with his disavowal of any intention to penetrate God's loftiness.[45]

John Demetracopoulos has pointed out that the concise but all-embracing way Anselm formulates the universal principle (16), which Anselm invokes to infer all the divine attributes in one step, is strikingly close to an argument reported in Cicero's *De natura deorum*.[46] Cicero reports there that the Stoic philosopher Balbus reproduced this 'concise' argument as having been propounded by the founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Citium. As Demetracopoulos comments, both arguments start from a concept of God as given; they both conclude the absolute (not relative) qualities of God from the maxim that God must be whatever it is better to be than not to be; and they both conclude with the same qualities – except for some exclusively Christian ones in Anselm's version, such as the doctrine of the Trinity. Demetracopoulos comments that:

> This line of argument is no more than a development of an argument of Zeno of Citium reproduced by Balbus in Cicero's *De natura deorum* immediately after the description of *Deus-mundus* as the best conceivable being.[47]

Of course, there are many points on which Anselm disagrees with Zeno, who identifies God with the cosmos, by maintaining that God does not have a body, a point to which Demetracopoulos draws attention. He notes:

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45 Campbell, *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, p. 462.

46 Demetracopoulos, 'The Stoic Background', pp. 135–36, quoting Cicero's *De natura deorum*, III,9,22. Demetracopoulos comments on the passage cited that:

> Let it be noted that in the *Proslogion*, this argument is produced in ch. 5, that is immediately after the argument for the existence of God built upon the '*quo majus cogitari non possit*', which in the *De natura deorum* occurs just a few paragraphs earlier in the text. Obviously enough, Anselm, following a Stoic pattern, first shows (on the basis of a Stoic *prolepsis* but in an original, non-Stoic, way) the existence of God and then deduces His qualities.

47 Demetracopoulos, 'The Stoic Background', p. 135.

> But, as Boethius had implicitly warned, the core of a right concept of something is imbued with various opinions by this or that man or nation and thus often appears deformed. So, Anselm might well think that Zeno had rightly conceived of the principle that God must be whatever it is for a being better to be than not to be but had failed to elaborate the correct list of the positive qualities.[48]

Nevertheless, I submit that, instead of adopting this Stoic 'quick fix', Anselm would have done better to stay with his *unum argumentum* and use *it* to infer just those properties which it would be appropriate to attribute to God. From (16) Anselm infers directly that:

> (17) You are whatever else we believe about the divine substance.

(17) has been inferred directly from (16) which in turn has been inferred from (15) which has been deduced from (1). Since (1) is equivalent to (UA), Anselm has deduced (17) from his *unum argumentum*. So, (UA) suffices to demonstrate (17), as Anselm said it would. It provides a short and sweet demonstration of how his criterion (f) is satisfied. That that is so is evident in his beginning *Proslogion* VI by asking:

> *And yet, since it is better to be sensible, omnipotent, merciful, impassible, than not to be, how are you sensible if You are not a body – or omnipotent, if you cannot do everything – or merciful and impassible at the same time?*

I will not explore here how Anselm tries to answer those questions; I have already done that in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*. But what is relevant here is that he has inferred (17) from the proposition which has been identified as his *unum argumentum*.

From *Proslogion* VI to XXIII, Anselm infers many of the characteristics which Christians believe to be true of God. Sometimes he uses (16) as a premise to do so, as the quote from *Proslogion* VI shows. But, as we saw in §11.3, he invokes the identity established in (UA) directly as a premise in *Proslogion* V, XIII, XV, and XXIII. Thus, it has been demonstrated that the proposition (UA) is what satisfies all six criteria which Anselm stipulate in the Preface that his *unum argumentum* would fulfil.

Lest what I have just said be misunderstood, may I say as firmly as I can that I am *not* claiming, nor have I ever claimed, that the three-stage proof of the

48 Demetracopoulos, 'The Stoic Background', p. 136, n. 89.

existence of God which I have discerned in *Proslogion* II and III is Anselm's *unum argumentum*. I have to say that so emphatically because I am aware that my exegesis of the three-stage proof in *Proslogion* II and III has been misunderstood as what I am proposing to be Anselm's *unum argumentum*. Anselm's proof in *Proslogion* II and III, and the cosmological reformulation of that proof in this book, is relevant only to the objectives (a) and (b). Only the first two of Anselm's six criteria are fulfilled by the three-stage proof he presents in *Proslogion* II and III.

9 Referring to God

I am claiming that the proposition (UA) is the only candidate which fulfils all six of the objectives Anselm specified that his *unum argumentum* would satisfy. However, while Anselm does assert in *Proslogion* IV that "God is *that* than which a greater cannot be thought", he never *asserts* that identity again thereafter. Rather, he *presupposes* it as having been established, as, for example, when he begins *Proslogion* V by asking:

> *What therefore are You, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought?*

In that question, he does not attach that phrase either to *aliquid* [something], as he has in *Proslogion* II and III, or to *id* [that] as he does in *Proslogion* IV. Instead, he attaches that phrase to the question "What are You, Lord God?". Similarly, in the *Reply* often the phrase "than which a greater cannot be thought" occurs without being attached to anything. We can only speculate about why he appears to be deliberately avoiding using the definite description: "*that* than which a greater cannot be thought" which Holopainen nevertheless claims to be Anselm's *unum argumentum*.

I said in §12.7 that the question quoted above is curious, for the attached clause answers the question asked by the main clause. It would, however, be a misreading to interpret that question as an expression of doubt about the proof Anselm has just completed. While he has proven in *Proslogion* III that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, it seems that he is looking for a different kind of answer to his question. But if so, what exactly is he asking for?

For a start, while Anselm is entirely comfortable with his conclusion in *Proslogion* IV that "God is that than which a greater cannot be thought", that

proposition is a proven fact expressed in third-person discourse. It does not convey the personal commitments which are implicit in first-to-second-person discourse. So, that identity needs to be asserted as a fact only once. There is no doubt that facts are very important for Anselm – otherwise he would not have written what he did in *Proslogion* II – but they are too impersonal to be used when he is addressing God. Perhaps that is why, from *Proslogion* V onwards, he chooses to avoid using "*id quo* ...." It retains too much of that impersonal nuance which is inappropriate when he is addressing God.

But Anselm has deeper reasons for regarding (UA) as an inadequate answer to the question he is asking here. In *Monologion* XV he writes:

> *I would be surprised if, among the words or names which we apply to things created from nothing, there could be found any which could worthily be said of the Substance* [*substantia*] *which is the Creator of all.*

That is a quite general point. But he goes on to render it more specific, writing:

> *Now, about relational terms, no one doubts that none of them applies to the substance of the thing of which they are predicated relationally.*

That is, while we use relational descriptions quite appropriately to refer to all sorts of things, they do not name the *kind* of thing to which the reference is being made. He justifies that by saying that if there never had existed any of the things in relation to which this Being is said to be supreme or greater, then it could not be understood to be supreme or greater, but it would still not be any the less good, nor suffer detriment to its essential greatness in any degree.

In *Monologion* XVI, Anselm observes that we standardly say that things 'have' qualities 'through' a quality [*per qualitatem*]. He understands predication in a Platonic way, as meaning that the subject in question *participates* – he uses Plato's word, "*participatione*" – in the relevant quality. So, it would seem that the Supreme Nature is called "just" through its participating in the quality of justice. But he argues that that way of understanding descriptions is not appropriate in the case of the Supreme Being, for he says:

> *But perhaps when* [this Supreme Being] *is said to be just or great or something similar, it is not evident what it is, but rather what kind of a thing it is, or how much it is. For no matter which of these* [is used]*, it seems to be said naturally through* [per] *its quality or quantity, because what is just is just through* [per] *justice, and likewise with other cases.*

But if that is what it is for the Supreme Nature to be just, it would be just "through another and not through itself" [*per aliud iusta, non per se*]. Rather, he concludes that while generally things *derive* their qualities 'through' being related to the quality itself, the Supreme Being does not 'have' justice; it *is* justice.

That is why Anselm asks the question he does at the beginning of *Proslogion* v. Since Anselm's *unum argumentum* identifies God as "something than which nothing greater could be thought", it refers to God *per aliud*. For "greater" is a relational description, and so is "could be thought".

That his *unum argumentum* identifies God *per aliud* is confirmed by what Anselm says in a teacher-student dialogue called *De Grammatico*, where Anselm explores how words are used to refer to things.[49] The dialogue begins with the teacher leading the student to distinguish between a word [*vox*] – a sound or written marks – and its sense [*sensus*]. The example discussed is the word "*grammaticus*" [expert-in-grammar]. He points out that that word signifies a man, but not in the same way as "*homo*" [human] does. The word "human" signifies a human being *per se* [through itself].[50] What "*grammaticus*" signifies *per se* is expertise in grammar. But when that word is used to refer to a human being who is an expert in grammar, it is signifying that human being *per aliud* [through another]. He is using the distinction between what is *per se* and *per aliud* in a way different from his use of that distinction in the early chapters of the *Monologion*, where he used it to distinguish between two different ways of existing.

To explain this distinction between referring *per se* and *per aliud*, the teacher invites the student to consider two little thought-experiments. In the first, unbeknown to the student, a white horse has been hidden inside a house. If someone said, "The white one is in the house", the student could not conceive in his mind anything other than the colour white. In the second thought-experiment he asks the student to imagine that a white horse and a black ox are standing in front of him and he is told, "Smite the white one". The

49 It is not clear when Anselm wrote *De Grammatico*. Three different periods have been suggested for the composition of Anselm's text: soon after his arrival at Bec, and during Anselm's time as prior of the abbey, and a third during his time as abbot of Bec. Jacob Archambault, 'Anselm's *De Grammatico*: structure, sources, pedagogical context'. (Forthcoming in S.L. Uckelman (ed.), *The Cambridge Critical Guide to Anselm's De Grammatico and De Veritate*), has examined the case for each dating, and concludes that it "was likely *written* during Anselm's time as prior of Bec, prior to his election as abbot in 1078, likely before 1076". He says that the earliest *publication* probably postdates his election as abbot.

50 Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol 1, p. 54 ff. translate *per se* in *De Grammatico* as "in and of itself" and *per aliud* as "on the basis of something else".

student has no trouble understanding that "the white one" refers to the horse. So, words like "expert-in-grammar" and "white" can be used to refer to things which they do not mean *per se*. It is necessary to take the context into account in order to identify what is being referred to *per aliud*.

What this excursus into *De Grammatico* confirms that when Anselm names God as "You … than whom nothing greater could be thought", his reference to God is *per aliud*. John Bayer has argued that when the distinctions in *De Grammatico* are broadly interpreted, this work raises matters about logic and semantics which are relevant to the *Proslogion*:

> It shows at least two things: first, the meaning of a spoken word is to be traced to an inner, pre-lettered word uttered 'in the heart' to take an Augustinian expression that Anselm will use in the *Proslogion*; and second, a word sometimes obtains its meaning *per aliud*, that is, or through a subjective experience or concrete experience.[51]

In a related article he shows how the distinctions in *De Grammatico* between signifying *per se* and signifying *per aliud* are parallel to the modern distinction between sense and reference. He suggests that a word signifies something *per se* when what the word refers to is determined by the conceptual meaning, the sense, of that word. But a word can also be used to signify something *per aliud*. In that case, the referent of a word is determined only partly by its sense, because features of the concrete context in which that word is used have to be taken into account to identify that to which the speaker is referring.[52]

The case of the Fool is just one example. In §3.7 I suggested likewise that Anselm's distinction in *Proslogion* IV between the two ways in which a thing can be thought is parallel to the modern distinction between sense and reference. Bayer analysis of Anselm's distinctions in *De Grammatico* help explicate this further.

He says that the meaning of a spoken word (*vox*) is to be traced to an inner, pre-lettered word (*sensus*) uttered 'in the heart'. He has explained that what he is calling "pre-lettered words" is "the apprehension of *meaning* (that is, *sensus*, which can be either *per se* or *per aliud*)".[53] So, just as it is possible to say aloud, or write, "There is not a god", so on the level of *voces*, that the fool can entertain

51 John Bayer, *The Unity of the* Proslogion: *Reason and Desire in the Monastic Theology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

52 John Bayer, 'Thinking God through the Unity of Life and Thought: How the *De Grammatico* Clarifies the *Proslogion*' (forthcoming in *Communio*).

53 Personal email, 25 August 2020.

that *sensus* in his thinking ; he can "say it in his heart". But the Fool cannot deny the existence of God on the level of the apprehension of the reality to which those meaningful *voces* refer. On this level, Bayer says, "I can no more deny God than deny the coherence of my own reason searching ever *ad meliora* [toward the better]".

Bayer points out that, for Anselm, the adjective "greater" [*maius*], which is at the centre of his indefinite description, can only signify God *per aliud*. The message he takes from *De Grammatico* is that we have to identify the context, the lived experience, "through which we encounter the reality this phrase names, and in which it obtains its meaning (*significativum per aliud*)". Applying the second thought-experiment in *De Grammatico* to the *Proslogion*, he suggests in his related article that we must ask ourselves:

> What is the 'house' in which the 'white horse' of the *Proslogion* – that is, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' – is hidden? And what is the 'black ox'; against which this 'greater' is known?

Bayer comments:

> If we want to understand words that signify *per aliud*, we cannot abstract from the experience within which these words obtain their meaning. So, what then is the *aliud* or *hoc* through which (*per*) the reader grasps the meaning of *maius* and thereby the reality named by the famous phrase that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought? What is the concrete situation in which we encounter the reality named by this phrase (*appellativum*), or in which it obtains its meaning (*significativum per aliud*)? Interpretations of the *Proslogion* must try to uncover the lived experience through which the Anselmian name of God obtains its meaning. What does this look like, concretely?

In his related article he comments that:

> As a first conclusion, we can disqualify interpretations of the *Proslogion* as an 'ontological' argument. Anselm is simply not arguing from a concept to a reality, because, once again, there is no concept for God – no word that is *per se significativum* of him. We do not know God essentially; we have no universal or concept to understand him as he is (neither *a priori* nor any other). The famous phrase therefore does not have meaning *per se*.

That takes us back to the emotionally-charged and existentially-laden opening prayer in *Proslogion* I, and to the monastic sources and spirituality that

permeate the entire work. For that is the context of Anselm's lived experience. Bayer rightly insists that words like "God" and "greater" are rooted in personal commitments. For Anselm, the questions of whether God exists and what He is are not just subjects of idle speculation, but life-determining issues, as I emphasized in §1.2. Bayer goes so far as to ask:

> But do I, the reader trying to follow Anselm, even believe my heart can be unified? Is there something to magnetize my every faculty? And is this *aliquid* something static, fixed, and definitively attainable (an idol). Or is it transcendent, something that pushes me further as soon as I attain it? I think such personal commitments as these must be decided before the reader can pass from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2–4.

One final quote from Bayer. He comments that:

> A good description of life, for Anselm, is the pursuit of greatness in all things. In his letters, he counselled everyone, lay and religious, to live always *ad meliora* [toward the better] or *ad altiorem* [toward the higher]…. Life exists in a permanent tension. At every moment, Anselm chose between justice and injustice, truth and falsity, goodness and evil. Reason functions precisely to facilitate such choices. There is always a chance to align with God, or to participate in *rectitudo*. Justice, truth and goodness – or everything great – is thus the final, un-encompassed horizon of all life and thought. The word *Deus*, for Anselm, names this horizon, the *id quo maius cogitari nequit*.

The description of Anselm's *unum argumentum* as the horizon of all life and thought is as insightful as it is profound.

The proposition (UA) has been identified as Anselm's *unum argumentum* because it has proven itself to be true, and it entails that God truly exists. Because it is a *relational* truth about God, that description is *per aliud*; it does not describe *what* God is in His very being. The question Anselm is asking at the beginning of *Proslogion* V amounts to asking: Which words are appropriate to describe God *per se*? Since (UA) has been proven, he can legitimately refer to God thereafter as "You, than whom a greater cannot be thought", use that understanding of God to investigate what can be said of Him *per se*. That is what he is doing in *Proslogion* V and in some of the later chapters.

Read this way, the *Proslogion* is an extraordinary 'little book' which displays a remarkable coherence. For it sustains a valid series of arguments all driven forward by the single reason which suddenly lit up his prayerful mind one gloomy evening in chapel and which proved itself in *Proslogion* III 'needing no other than itself alone for proving itself'.

CHAPTER 12

The Contemporary Relevance of Anselm's Metaphysical Views

When we reflect on some of the concepts underlying Anselm's original proof, it is all too easy to interpret them as locked within a framework of metaphysical ideas which were prevalent at the time, but which no longer resonate with modern thinking. For example, David Smith, who has explored Anselm's thinking at greater depth than most other commentators, comments on how Anselm deals with an issue which Smith had been bothering about:

> This filling of the dialectical loophole in the *Proslogion* III argument is totally dependent upon Anselm's metaphysical views, which surface and inform the arguments in the *Reply* in a way that they do not in the *Proslogion*. These metaphysical views are, from a modern perspective, not only striking, but strikingly implausible.[1]

But if Anselm's metaphysical views are so implausible from a modern perspective, why does his proof continue to attract so much interest and debate not only from historians of medieval thought, but also from hard-headed philosophers, and theologians of widely differing backgrounds? It seems that there is something in his proof which attracts attention across the centuries. I, for one, have found it as intriguing as it is challenging.

In this chapter I shall identify which of his metaphysical views might appear to be outdated and quaint, and work systematically through them to see whether that superficial impression is sustainable. I foreshadow that I have found that his views engage with issues and debates which are very much on the modern intellectual agenda.

Already in Chapter 4 we have reviewed developments in modern cosmology, but this investigation will require looking more broadly at the very character of modern scientific experimentation and theorising, and its metaphysical underpinnings. It will lead to an encounter with a contemporary philosopher who proposes a 'principle of unreason' and maintains that *everything*, with no exceptions, is able not to exist. While that dictum is inconsistent with Anselm's conclusions, it is striking that it engages so immediately and directly with one

1 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 124. This assessment will be considered in §12.5.

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of the quintessential features of Anselm's metaphysical views. Maybe Anselm's metaphysical ideas are not so out-of-date after all!

1 Two Conceptions of Existing

So what are these ideas which are supposed to be outdated and frankly quaint? Let us begin with the conclusions of Anselm's proof:

> *You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist. Therefore, You alone have being most truly of all and for that reason most greatly of all, because whatever is other* [than You] *does not exist so truly, and for this reason has less being.*

When those two conclusions are compared with the conclusion of Stage One it is evident Anselm is operating with two different conceptions of existing. For Stage One addresses the question: "Is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *in reality,* or *not*?" That question admits no third possibility, no question of having being 'more' or 'less' greatly.

When I introduced these two conceptions of existing in §3.5 I noted that what is involved in Stage One is the *binary* conception of existence, because it admits only two possibilities: something is either in reality, or it is not. Anselm expresses his Stage One argument in terms of this binary conception because he is addressing the question: "*Is there not* anything *of this nature*?" – that is, "Is there not anything than which nothing greater could be thought?" For him, that is the prior question to ask, for nothing has any mode of existing if it is a fiction.[2]

For someone like Anselm, there is no incompatibility between the binary conception of existence assumed in Stage One and the graduated conception assumed in Stages Two and Three. When Sigbjorn Sonnesyn was assisting with the editing of *Rethinking Anselm's Argument*, he suggested an analogy which nicely illustrates how Anselm both contrasts non-being with being, and conjoins with that the graduated conception. He drew my attention to

2 I am aware that saying that, for Anselm, "nothing has any mode of existing if it is a fiction" contradicts all those translations of *Proslogion* II which render "*est in intellectu*" as "*exists* in the understanding". I find nothing in Anselm's writings which even suggests that "*est in intellectu*" means that being *in intellectu* is a mode of *existing*. His use of that phrase is unfortunate because it has been interpreted as a strange sort of ontological category, but it need mean no more than what people today mean when they speak of having something "in mind".

the adjectival use of numbers in describing how many players are required to play a game. To repeat, the game of solitaire requires only one player, tennis requires two or four, soccer and cricket require eleven per side, rugby league thirteen per side, and rugby union fifteen per side. But if there are no players, no game can be played at all. Sonnesyn remarked:

> The relation of non-being to being in Anselm seems to me rather like zero to any positive number – the infinite chasm between nothing and a complexity admitting of degrees.[3]

To establish that something is in reality is to cross the threshold from nothing to something, from non-being to being.[4]

Having established in Stage One of his proof that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality, in *Proslogion* III Anselm introduces a different conception of existing, inherited from Plato via Augustine, which admits that some things can exist more intensely than others. I understand that some modern thinkers find this graduated conception of existing bizarre.

Yet the very notion that something can have some quality more intensely than another is not at all bizarre. Printers, painters, and photographers know that something can have the same colour as something else, but have it more intensely. That distinction is expressed as having the same *hue*, but with a different *saturation*. Likewise, pains can be more or less intense, and someone can concentrate on a particular matter more or less intensely. Indeed, many features of reality can be more or less intense. So, it cannot be the concept of having a quality more intensely which is thought to be bizarre.

What is thought to be bizarre is that something could *exist* more intensely than another. For Anselm, the reason why some things "have less being" is that there are times when they do not exist; Anselm infers from that they exist *per aliud*, that they exist at all is dependent upon something else. Furthermore, for all the time that they exist, their existence is precarious, because they are vulnerable whenever they exist to being destroyed. Not only that, but some things are also more vulnerable, more liable to extinction, than others. So why not

3 Quoted in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, pp. 145–6.

4 For that reason, Peano was making a quite revolutionary claim when he presented his formalization of arithmetic as an axiomatic system with "0 is a number" as its first axiom. The adjectival use of numbers does not count 0 as a number, for no game can be played with no players. This analogy should not be pressed further than this point; of course, because the series of natural numbers is infinite, whereas Anselm's series of lesser and greater goods has a maximum.

also allow that existing itself is also subject to degrees of intensity, since not all things have the same ability to survive?

The reason why there is such resistance to allowing that existing itself is also subject to degrees of intensity is because the binary conception came to be converted from the simple question about whether or not something is a fiction, into a metaphysical principle: that *there is only one way of existing*. I shall discuss in the following section how that development has occurred.

For Anselm, whether something is in reality is a different issue from the important and related issue of determining the *manner* of that thing's existence. I submit that he is right to insist on that. If something is in reality – if it exists in this binary sense – it exists somehow. But things do not all exist in the same way. Some exist more robustly than those which are more delicate or fragile. Everything which exists contingently has an insecure hold on existence, and eventually ceases to exist, but for some their hold on existence is more insecure than it is for others.

There is nothing in this which is at odds with what has been discovered by modern science. Modern physics provides explanations of the forces which cause atoms to combine to form molecules, which in turn constitute compounds which are more or less stable and more or less capable of being dissolved or otherwise broken. Some are 'energy wells' which can only be disrupted by the input of a great deal of external energy. Others exist in a way which is far from equilibrium and can be disrupted by much smaller inputs of energy.

Modern biology explains how certain complexes of chemicals have somehow transformed themselves to serve as the cells which constitute the bodies of living creatures. What is remarkable about plants, insects, fish, and animals is that they keep on existing even though they are all in states which are far from equilibrium. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics that should not happen; entropy should kick in to convert them to mush. However, they not only survive, but they also flourish and reproduce and evolve into ever more complex species.

Many writers have tried to explain how those pervasive phenomena are even possible, but the clearest and most plausible explanation of which I am aware has been given by Mark Bickhard.[5] He points out that even inorganic phenomena such a candle flames, are self-maintenant. The heat they generate both melts the wax below them, thus maintaining a flow of fuel, and causes the carbon dioxide produced by burning to rise, sucking in the oxygen needed to

5 Mark Bickhard has developed and elaborated these views over many years through a long series of papers some of which I list in the Bibliography.

continue burning. That is but one of countless natural phenomena which are self-maintenant.

Living creatures are also in a far-from-equilibrium state, but are also self-maintenant. What enables living creatures to stay alive for a significant period of time, Bickhard explains, is because they have developed a capacity to *change* the ways they interact with their environments, adapting the operation of their interactive mechanisms as their circumstances change, they maintain their capacity to be self-maintenant. All living creatures are what he calls "*recursively self-maintenant*".[6] Having developed the ability to interact with their environment in a way which enables them to detect changes in it, they adapt their behaviour in order to keep on consuming what they need in order to stay alive. That is what is distinctive about all living creatures.

I submit that this knowledge which we humans have acquired about ourselves and the world in which we live shows that the thesis that some things exist more intensely than others is well-confirmed. For that is an illuminating way of thinking about the differences in the capacity to persist in existence which are manifest in every observable thing in the universe.

Of course, acknowledging that things exist more or less intensely does not, by itself, entail that something exists maximally. But it does show that to dismiss Anselm's conception of existence as admitting degrees of intensity as nothing more than a version of Neoplatonism which is now outdated is superficial and unjustified. For I believe that our understanding of the kinds of things which we find in reality will be all the more insightful for reviving, in a quite new form, that way of thinking about the variety in the modes of existence which have been revealed in modern times.

2 The Denial That Existing Has Degrees of Intensity

The two conceptions of existence are so fundamental to Anselm's understanding of God and are so central to his proof. So, it is important to understand why the conception of existing as admitting degrees of intensity should be regarded so widely today as almost unintelligible. I suggested in the previous section that, despite the manifest evidence which supports such a conception, what has happened is that the binary conception of existing hardened into the metaphysical thesis that there is only one way of existing. The only way

6 I have expounded Bickhard's views, explaining the concept of recursive self-maintenance, and how it is the distinguishing characteristic of all living things, in my *The Metaphysics of Emergence*.

to understand why that happened is to retrace the historical developments which led to the emergence of the modern conception of science.

When Anselm was writing the *Proslogion* only a few works of Aristotle were available in Western Europe. He would have been acquainted with Aristotle's contributions to logic mainly through reading the commentaries of Boethius on logical topics. But when Aristotle's metaphysical writings became available in Western Europe from the mid-12th Century to the mid-13th Century, the simple conceptions of things having powers to bring about changes was elaborated into a complex metaphysical model. In this model, entities – what in Latin were called "*substantiae*" – are what exist primarily. What kind of thing they are is determined by the *form* they have, which is embodied in some *matter*.

To explain changes, four kinds of causes were posited. 'Formal causes' explain what something is; 'material causes' explain what it is made out of; 'efficient causes' identify what made it happen; and 'final causes' explain something's behaviour in terms of what it is *for*. That explanatory framework supported a powerful concept of scientific explanation. Put very simply, in this model, once all the agents active in a given situation have been identified, and the contributions each has made to what happened have been distinguished, the action of each of those agents could be explained in terms of what it is made of and what its essence is. For only the form of a thing makes it to be what it is; its matter makes no positive contribution to its essence. Consequently, the essences of things are intelligible. Since the essence of a thing is determined by solely by its form, that essence can be articulated in a definition. Since definitions are necessary truths, this model of explanation was taken to deliver the kind of knowledge which can be expressed in terms of necessities. That kind of knowledge of necessities was what they called *scientia*.

That conception of knowledge was based on metaphysical principles first articulated by Aristotle. Underpinning it was Plato's model of the world as having being made by a super-craftsman, a 'demiurge', who preconceives beforehand what he intends to make, and then seeks to realize that form in some formless stuff, "as best he can", as Plato said.[7] This 'likely story' portrays the demiurge as like a potter who shapes clay into the form of a bowl. Aristotle did not accept that the world has been made, since he argued that it has no beginning; it has an infinite past. Nevertheless, he accepted from Plato that natural objects are 'as if' they are the work of a craftsman:

> If a house were one of the things which come to be due to nature, it would come to be just as it now does by the agency of art [*technē*]; and if things

7 Plato, *Timaeus*.

> which are due to nature came to be not only due to nature but also due to art, they would come to be just as if they are by nature. The one, then is for the other.[8]

Plato had no word to describe the formless stuff out of which the demiurge made the world. But Aristotle provided one by generalizing the word "*hylē*", which meant "timber" in Greek – the stuff tables, chairs and houses are made of – to mean whatever *anything* is made out of. Accordingly, for the medievals from the 13th Century on, all things in the world are made of some sort of *materia* [matter].

When the 17th Century dawned, that grand synthesis of Greek metaphysics and Biblical thought, which was the great intellectual achievement of the high Middle Ages, was disintegrating.[9] Although that synthesis had lasted for more than a millennium, creation *ex nihilo* was not really compatible with understanding everything as if they are artefacts, fashioned into forms out of pre-existent matter. That model is inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian model of a God who creates all other things from *noth*ing, simply *calling* them into existence by saying "Let there be …".[10] Eventually, those inherent tensions became too strong – and the grand synthesis fractured.

As with all major historical changes, there is no one simple explanation of why that happened; numerous factors worked together to render the later medieval conception of *scientia* unattainable. Amongst the many contributing factors were problems in explaining within that framework certain phenomena to do with motion. Then there were unresolved disputes about the status of the Forms: did they exist independently of worldly things? Or do they only exist in worldly things? Or is there nothing more to the issue than that fact that we use general words to describe things? Also, increasing pressure came from another quarter as, towards the end of the medieval period, theologians raised an increasing number of objections, complaining that the Aristotelian metaphysical model did not leave enough room for the freedom of God's will, for the will of God could never be subject to necessity. The debates were often inconclusive, but by the end of the middle ages, there was growing scepticism

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8 Aristotle, *Physics*, 2.8, 199^{a}12–16.

9 For a detailed account of this model and why it collapsed, see my *Truth and Historicity*, ch. 8.

10 The incompatibility between those two models of 'world-making' is brilliantly exposed in an essay by M.B. Foster, 'The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science', *Mind*, 43 (1934), pp. 446–68. I shall comment further on his analysis in §13.3.

as to whether it was ever possible to attain *scientia* – the kind of knowledge which is necessarily true – about worldly things.

It was to find a more secure foundation for the sciences in the face of increasing scepticism that, in 1641, René Descartes published his famous *Meditations in First Philosophy*. Searching systematically for a source of knowledge which could not be doubted, he quickly dismissed the evidence of his senses, for they are unreliable. He could not even trust mathematics, because perhaps there is some malignant demon who keeps interfering with his reasoning whenever he tried to add the numbers 2 and 3. Eventually he hit upon just one proposition: "I am, I exist", which he found to be true every time he uttered or thought it. From that he inferred that he was a thinking thing, a *res cogitans*, and that all other things were extended in space and consequently could be studied by geometry. In order to eliminate the hypothesis of the evil demon, he invented 'the ontological argument', arguing that since he finds within himself the *idea* of God as a being who has all the perfections, including existence, God must exist.[11] So, apart from God, there are only two kinds of substance: mind and extended matter.

Because Descartes proposed that the essence of the material world is simply being extended – being spread out in space and time – he proposed that all science could be reduced to geometry. Given such a view, final causes were, as Descartes proclaimed, "useless in physics". He also shocked his readers by advocating an idea which had been suggested in the medieval period, but had not gained much acceptance.[12] He proposed that necessary truths, such as those of mathematics, are eternal, not because they are in the Mind of God, but because they too are divine creations. They appear to be necessary only because God does not change His will. It took only 48 years before Giambattista Vico declared, "We demonstrate geometry because *we make it*".[13]

Reducing every bodily thing to spatial extension proved to be too restrictive, but before the century was over, a new conception of science had emerged, which rejected the whole apparatus of forms and matter, and the four causes of the medieval Aristotelians. Most significantly, John Locke argued that we do not know the real essences of things, which were supposed to make them what they are, and how they behave. According to Locke, what were called the 'essences' of things are nothing other than the *names* by which we express the

11 I will return to this in §13.6 below.

12 As was noted in §10.10, a student and friend of Anselm, Gilbert Crispin, had discussed whether God is identical to the natural numbers and concluded, or rather stated, that the numbers have been created by God. But that radical idea did not gain much of a following until it was revived by Descartes.

13 Vico, *De Nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, 85, 23.

ideas we have of them. Since in medieval times, the essence of anything was supposed to be determined by its form, Locke's distinction between the real essence of things and their nominal essence broke those forms in two. I have called this "The Fracture of the Forms".[14]

On the other hand, while we attribute other qualities to things, what is being referred to is the capacity of things to produce various sensations in us. While it is correct to say that a ripe tomato is red, the quality of redness refers to how that tomato is perceived. While tomatoes would still have the primary qualities which cause light to be reflected off their skins in a way which makes us see them as red, if there were no observers of tomatoes they would not have, in themselves, the perceptual quality of being red, for perceptual qualities require perceivers. So, all these other qualities were said to be 'secondary'.

Isaac Newton soon produced a modified and more plausible version of Descartes' ideal of a mathematical physics. Physics was no longer a description of the natures of all sorts of things; it was reduced to a mathematical theory concerning the behaviour of tiny entities with only a very few primary qualities, such as solidity, extension, motion, number and figure. The primary qualities are inseparable from things themselves, and belong to them even when they are not being perceived by anyone. They are measurable, and therefore their relations can be described mathematically. The new model of the world was a clock, which has a hidden mechanism, although there were two anomalies which did not fit that mechanical model: the force of 'affinity' by which solid bodies adhered to each other, and another mysterious force which acted at a distance, called 'gravity'.

In the light of those developments, it is not difficult to understand why the binary conception came to be the dominant conception of existence, with the other conception which admitted of degrees of intensity persisting only in religious circles. That former conception acquired a new significance; it was elevated to the status of a metaphysical principle: *there is only one way of existing*.

According to the new metaphysical model introduced by the scientific revolution of the 17th Century, there is nothing other than matters of fact. This model presented the world as very minimal and 'horizontal' in which whatever happened always resulted from mechanical relationships. We now live today with, and have adjusted our thinking to, a world in which things either exist, or do not, and that is that.

Modern philosophers like to think that they are free of dogma, but "dogmatic" does seem to be the right word to describe their uncritical assumption

14 Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*, ch. 8.

that *there is only one way of existing*.[15] It is so easy to assume that something either exists, or it does not, and there is nothing more to be said. Of course, that something either exists or it does not is an instance of a Law of Excluded Middle, first identified by Aristotle, and which continues to be maintained as a law in the standard system of formal logic.[16] As noted above, that binary conception is compatible with the conception of existence as having degrees of intensity. But when the binary concept of existence was hardened into the *only* conception of existence, the alternative view was dismissed as unintelligible to everyone, other than those who believe in God.

Over the next three centuries, that model of physical existence has become the new paradigm for much experimental science. Another major intellectual development has fed into this worldview. Roughly a hundred years ago, a new way of doing logic burst on the philosophical scene. In this new system of symbolic logic, sentences are analysed in terms of the quantifiers "some *x*" and "any *x*" which range over a domain of particular objects. Since propositions are either true or false, this symbolic logic entrenched the binary conception of existence, for it interprets "some *x*" as meaning, "There exists an *x* such that …". Only one more step is required to arrive at the thesis of physicalism: identify those particular things with 'the basic bits of matter'. That sounds simple; indeed its simple-mindedness is why so many find it attractive.

3 The Rise of Physicalism

So prevalent had that way of thinking become that by the end of the 20th Century the orthodoxy amongst philosophers in the tradition of Anglophone analytic philosophy was a position called "physicalism". That term was introduced in the 1930s by two key members of the Vienna Circle, Otto Neurath and Rudolph Carnap, who both contended that every meaningful statement is synonymous with a physical statement. But, as Daniel Stoljar has observed, because of the rejection of logical positivism, physicalism is not a linguistic

15 For example, George Molnar, who in his book, *Powers* argues against the prevailing Humean account of causality, writes on his first page that: "The assumptions are: first, that 'existence' is univocal, in that although there are different types of thing which exist, there is only one type of existence, …".

16 Some logicians have developed systems of symbolic logic which admit more than two values, but while those are valid technical exercises, whether more than two truth-values may be assigned to propositions is a different issue from the metaphysical issue of whether there is just one way of existing.

thesis for contemporary philosophers and the words "physicalism" and "materialism" are often used interchangeably.[17]

Many philosophers thought it to be self-evident that what exists is, at bottom, nothing but what they loosely call 'basic bits of matter'. To cite just two influential examples, Jaegwon Kim asserted that "all the things that exist are physical things – either basic bits of matter or made up of bits of matter".[18] Similarly, in introducing a set of essays on *Physicalism and Its Discontents*, Barry Loewer characterized physicalism as claiming that "all facts obtain *in virtue of* the distribution of the fundamental entities and properties – whatever they turn out to be – of completed *fundamental physics*".[19] All that happens in the world is determined ultimately by the behaviour of these 'basic bits of matter', the 'fundamental entities and their properties', which are assumed to be the basic ingredients which compose the world.

On this view, the self-maintaining behaviour of all living creatures, and the mental activity of human beings, is ultimately determined by the basic laws of physics. While this new-fangled doctrine of physicalism is presented as scientifically literate and up-to-date, in fact, it is a hangover from Newtonian atomism. It is given the appearance of precision by the modern logic of particulars. As I shall shortly explain, contemporary physics is incompatible with the physicalist assumption that all there is, at bottom, are basic particular entities.

It has proved extraordinarily difficult to articulate precisely and consistently what the thesis of physicalism is.[20] In the 20th Century the science of physics made remarkable progress. Newtonian atoms were found not to be atomic at all, but composed of neutrons, electrons and protons.[21] But then they were found to be complex too. Currently, all known so-called 'elementary particles' are classified in a table called the Standard Model, which also includes three of the four fundamental forces in the universe: the electromagnetic, the weak, and the strong interaction forces, but not the gravitational force. It was developed in stages throughout the latter half of the 20th Century, through the work of many scientists around the world, with the current formulation being

17 Stoljar, Daniel, "Physicalism", (2001, revised 2015) in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/physicalism (accessed 27 March 2021).

18 Jaegwon Kim, 'Précis of *Mind in a Physical World*' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65:3 (2002), p. 640. The same is expressed in his *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton, NJ / Oxford, 2005), p. 37.

19 Barry Loewer, 'From Physics to Physicalism' in *Physicalism and Its Discontents*, ed. Carl Gillett and Barry Loewer (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 37–56, at p. 37.

20 That is the theme of Daniel Stoljar's *Physicalism* (Abingdon, 2010).

21 The word "atom" comes the ancient Greek word "*atomos*" which means 'cannot be cut'. Atoms were supposed to be indivisible.

finalized in the mid-1970s with the experimental confirmation of the existence of quarks. Since then, confirmation of the top quark (in 1995), the tau neutrino (in 2000), and the Higgs boson (in 2012) have added further credence to the Standard Model, although it is not altogether free of problems.

This model has successfully predicted experimental results, but there are some phenomena which remain unexplained, and it falls short of being a complete theory of fundamental interactions. A major issue, still to be resolved, is how to incorporate within it the full theory of gravitation, as described by the General Theory of Relativity. Nor does it account for the accelerating expansion of the universe. There are multiple speculations as to how these outstanding issues might be resolved, but none of those speculations so far has yielded empirically testable predictions.

Many philosophical adherents to the physicalist worldview are aware that the current Standard Model of Quantum Theory cannot be a comprehensive theory of physical reality. Nevertheless they continue to maintain, in Loewer's words, "that everything is determined by the distribution of the fundamental entities and properties – whatever they turn out to be – of completed fundamental physics". So, they are agnostic about what exactly these 'bits of matter' are. That pushes the meaning of this thesis off into the never-never. But, they insist, whatever these fundamental entities are, they are 'basic particulars'. The old idea adopted by the philosophers of ancient Greece, that what primarily exists are entities, 'things' in the strong sense of the word, with fixed natures, continues to exercise its sway over contemporary philosophers, transformed into this concept of 'basic particulars'.

But quantum theory has moved beyond entities in that sense. Although the word "particle" continues to be used by physicists, what are called "particles" are not particles in any serious sense; they are quantized nodes in a vibrating field.[22] What carries energy and momentum, possibly angular momentum and other conserved quantities, are quantum fields in process. These quantum fields carry signals: information. They can carry influences from one place to another place over time. For decades biologists have understood that what they are studying are processes, and it is becoming clear that the appropriate metaphysical underpinning required to explain the phenomena studied by physics and chemistry has to give priority to processes over entities.[23] Furthermore,

22 I explain this in *The Metaphysics of Emergence*, ch. 3.

23 That thesis is the underlying theme of *The Metaphysics of Emergence*.

it has been demonstrated that the logic of processes is significantly different from the logic of particular things.[24]

As will be seen in the following section, many scientific explanations are effective because they are reductive. But the claim that everything in the universe is "nothing but bits of matter" – or even quantum fields – is not a scientific theory; it is a *metaphysical* theory of an extremely limiting kind, based on a model which is not supported by modern physics. For it cannot even admit the possibility that genuinely novel kinds of thing have emerged from this physical base. Thus it excludes *a priori* any conception of existence which admits that things have emerged whose mode of existence is more or less intense. Consequently, it cannot plausibly explain how there could have emerged human beings who could contemplate such a theory. That is the well-known paradox which no monistic theory has ever satisfactorily resolved.

4 Anselm's Understanding of Abilities

That some things have a stronger ability to exist than others raises the issue of Anselm's understanding of possibilities as abilities, which I commented upon in §3.6. For him, what is possible is a matter of what things are *able* to do, and what *can* be done to them. I have emphasized throughout that for Anselm the verb "*potest*" not only means "is possible" but also "is able" and "can". For what is possible, and what can be so, is always a matter ultimately determined by relevant abilities, and they depend upon the exercise of power, *potestas*. He does not show much interest in what we now call "logical possibility" other than to insist that what is contradictory "cannot be".

We saw in §3.6 that, for Anselm, what is possible is a matter of what powers are being exercised by some relevant thing or things. I pointed out that, since he was writing in Latin, the words themselves make it obvious that possibilities and abilities are connected to powers. The English word "possible" is derived from the Latin "*possibilis*", which is composed of the infinitive verb, *posse* and the suffix –"*ibilis*". When "*possibilis*" migrated from Latin to English, what dropped from sight is the fact that that verb "*posse*" is also the root of the word "*potestas*", which means "power".[25]

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24 That has been demonstrated by Johanna Seibt, 'Formal Process Ontology', FOIS-2001 Proceedings, ACM Digital Publications, 2001.

25 Sigbjorn Sonnesyn has informed me that the compound "*possibilis*" was coined by Quintillian to translate the Greek "*dynatós*", which has the same etymological make-up. The Latin word "*potentia*" [power] is directly parallel to the Greek word "*dynamis*".

Yet that way of conceptualizing possibility has been largely eliminated both from the English language and from much contemporary philosophy of science. In a worldview in which there is only one way of being, and where what there is has been reduced to things with just a few primary qualities, there is no need for millions of different *kinds* of substance, all with their distinctive forms, so explaining change in terms of powers became obsolete. Even the 17th Century playwright Molière famously poked fun at the very idea that powers explain anything.

That any phenomenon is to be explained by identifying which agents brought it about – what the medievals had called the "efficient cause" – was then dismissed in the 18th Century by David Hume. Rejecting the very idea of powers, he reduced all causation to patterns of constant conjunctions amongst phenomena. Hume argued that there are no 'necessary connections' amongst phenomena. Rather, the source of the *idea* that there are such necessary connections is in our thinking, not in the realities we observe. He claimed that the *idea* of some sort of necessary connection between cause and effect is nothing more than a felt determination in our thinking generated by our having observed that certain objects of perception regularly occur in short succession. So, when we see one of the first sort, we expect to see one of the second sort. According to him, that is all there is to the concept of a cause: a subjective expectation based on observing constant conjunctions. There is no place in this account of causation for the concept of an agent which has a power which can be exercised to do something.

However, it is becoming increasingly manifest that that framework is inadequate to explain the complexity of the phenomena we daily observe. Hume's view that the laws of nature simply describe observed regularities in phenomena has been adopted by very many contemporary analytic philosophers. But it falls foul of the fact that strict regularities are rarely observed in nature.[26] The actual behaviour of a system depends on the environment it is in, and what actually occurs is the resultant of all the influences being exerted in that environment acting upon each other. External influences typically disrupt any law-like regularity of appearances. To try to accommodate that fact by characterizing causal laws as describing what always happens 'unless something interferes', is to render them trivially true.

26 As Nancy Cartwright, for example, has pointed out on numerous occasions: 'Do the Laws of Physics State the Facts?' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 61:1–2 (1980), pp. 75–84; *How the Laws of Physics Lie*; *Nature's Capacities and their Measurement*; *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science*.

While Hume had good reasons to deny that there are necessary connections amongst objects, it does not follow that natural objects have no powers. For a power is an ability, not a necessity. Consequently, over the past twenty years a small group of philosophers have begun to argue that to account both for causality in general, and for the explanatory function which laws serve in natural science, in particular, it is time to take the concept of *powers* seriously again.[27] To date, the most carefully work-out account along these lines is by Richard Corry. He points out that much – although not all – of contemporary science is concerned to provide reductive explanations of phenomena, that is:

> an explanation which proceeds by treating the system of interest as being made of component parts, and this phenomenon is then explained by reference to the properties of, and the interactions between, those parts.[28]

He quotes the physicist Paul Davies who has written:

> Few would deny the efficacy of the reductionist method of investigation. The behaviour of gases, for example, would lack a satisfactory explanation without taking into account the underlying molecular basis. If no reference were made to atoms, chemistry would amount to little more than a complicated set of ad hoc rules, while radioactivity would remain a complete mystery.[29]

Corry argues that reductive explanations assume the existence of something which plays the role of a causal influence, and that this role cannot be fulfilled by anything in the standard ontologies.[30] His argument for that conclusion has introduced the notions of causal powers and dispositions. Indeed, in the emerging literature on the topic, some authors use the words "powers" and "dispositions" interchangeably, while others argue that powers are a particular kind of disposition.

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27 See, for example, George Molnar, *Powers – A Study in Metaphysics*; Stephen Mumford & Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers*; Jonathon D. Jacobs, ed., *Causal Powers*; Richard Corry, *Power and Influence*.

28 Corry, *Power and Influence*, pp. 1–2.

29 Paul Davies, 'The Physis of Downward Causation?', in *The Re-Emergence of Emergence*, ed. Phillip Layton and Paul Davies pp. 35–52, at p. 35. Corry notes that it is possible to develop a reductive *explanation* without making use of the reductive *method* (p. 4). Often in the history of science a reductive hypothesis is proposed long before the hypothesised components are confirmed.

30 Corry, *Power and Influence*, p. 40.

Corry then argues for a three-fold analysis of causation which makes reductive explanations possible: a *power* is a disposition to exert an *influence*, and the *manifestation* of a power is not typically a change in some property, but, rather, the existence of a causal *influence* which makes a contribution to such a change.[31] He points out that his analysis of the *concept* of causal power itself is not reductive, because he is explaining the causal concept 'power' in terms of two other causal concepts: 'exerting' and 'influence'. He takes the output of a power (an influence) to involve a primitive modality which cannot be analysed away, and so a reductive analysis of that concept is not possible.[32]

I find the case he has presented to be a very plausible. Such a threefold model is required to explain the success of scientific theories in providing reductive explanations of observed phenomena. The flip side of his case is that those phenomena for which it is not possible to provide a reductive explanation are precisely those phenomena which are emergent. The two issues of emergence and causation are connected.[33]

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of this way of understanding causation. I cite Corry's analysis because it shows that Anselm's way of speaking about abilities is far from antiquated. He was intuitively attuned to the kind of account of causation which underpins the practice of contemporary science.

It is not difficult to express what Anselm says in the terms used by Corry. In his *De Veritate* Anselm speaks of inanimate phenomena such as fire as "doing what it ought" [*facit quod debet*] when it heats. That sounds naïve, but I interpret him as advocating an underlying metaphysics of immanent teleology. Things have proper functions which they serve when they are operating properly. In Corry's terminology, what Anselm says can be expressed as that fires have a disposition to exert an influence – heating – on things nearby. When that power is exercised in combination with other factors, such as a sufficient supply of oxygen, and the absence of a deluge of water, it exerts an influence to bring about changes: flammable things are burnt.

As for Anselm's saying that "What does not exist is able not to exist", that makes perfect sense when it is recognized that Anselm himself regards that as true but improperly expressed. To take an example I have used before, I do not have a sister. Since it would have been good to have had a sister, I say regretfully, "My sister does not exist". According to Anselm's *Reply* V principle, that implies that "My sister is able not to exist". If someone were to object that whatever

31 Corry, *Power and Influence*, p. 48.

32 Corry, *Power and Influence*, p. 49.

33 For an account of emergence based on the organization of processes, see Campbell, *The Metaphysics of Emergence*.

does not exist does not have any abilities, Anselm would say, "I agree; that is true, but improperly said". What is true is that since my parents gave birth to two sons, it appears that they had the ability to give birth also to a daughter, but for reasons unknown to me – and probably to them – that power was not exercised successfully. Some circumstances prevented that from happening.

Of course, Corry's analysis is much more sophisticated and more thoroughly worked out than Anselm's use of the verb "*potest*" and its cognates. But that is no criticism of Anselm. It is enough to show that Anselm's way of speaking about existence in terms of abilities and powers is supported by such a thorough and plausible analysis of explanation and causation to show that the metaphysical ideas embedded in his proof are compatible with contemporary philosophy of high quality.

So, we have found that Anselm's understanding of possibilities and necessities in terms of abilities and powers is not so 'old-fashioned' and 'out-of-date' as some believe. For it has become apparent that they are precisely what is required to explicate and justify the reductive method employed whenever possible in modern science. And it is because not all phenomena admit of reductive explanation, the emergence of things with properties different from the constituents from which they have emerged renders intelligible a conception of existing which recognizes that things exist with different degrees of complexity and intensity.

5 Anselm's Account of Understanding

Anselm's understanding of possibility in terms of abilities and powers is evident in his indefinite description: "something-than-which-nothing-greater-could-be-thought". That description seems to be about the limitations of our ability to think. But since Anselm infers that something can be thought from its being possible, what can and what cannot be thought is ultimately determined by how things are, for what is possible is grounded in what is actual.

Not only is that Anselmian principle vindicated by the reductive explanations so frequently, but not universally, developed in modern science, but that principle applies to the issue of what can be thought. For him, the limits to what can be thought are determined by the natures of things, not just by our capacity for thinking. That is why Anselm maintains that the more significant way in which something can be thought is when the thing itself is understood.

But while Anselm had no difficulty in insisting that one way of thinking of something is to understand the thing itself, for us today has become problematic to say that *things* are what can be understood. For us, understanding

is a form of thinking, and what we think are thoughts, not things. While that seems so obvious, it is, in fact, a symptom of the lingering inheritance of the subject-object dichotomy introduced by Descartes which continues to bedevil contemporary theories of knowledge and of truth. For the standard accounts of knowledge in what is called "the Philosophy of Mind" assume that we form mental representations which are intended somehow to 'correspond' to reality. Posed that way, the issue of truth becomes the question of how the subjectivity of a speaker who asserts a statement (or a thinker who thinks a thought), *corresponds* to the objectivity of what in reality is the 'truth-maker' of that statement or thought.

That dichotomy between subject and object sharpens and justifies Gaunilo's objection in *On Behalf of the Fool* IV that "No true thing can scarcely, or ever, be thought by reference to a word alone". It is what justifies the resistance which has already been identified in §2.1 to the very possibility of proving, purely by rational argumentation, the existence of *anything* from what can be thought. That objection is, of course, directed primarily against the standard misinterpretation of Anselm's proof as a version of 'the ontological argument', articulated in *Proslogion* II. But even when his proof is properly construed as a three-stage argument, and is grounded on the fact that every observable thing in the universe has a beginning, it is still the case that the existence of something is being deduced from a description which presupposes that there is a limit to what can be thought.

I have already commented in §2.1 on the falsity of what I called the Empiricists' Principle:

> The relation between thinking and the existence of anything other than thinking itself is a contingent one.

I will not repeat my objections to that so-called principle here. But behind that alleged principle is a way of understanding how thought relates to reality which warrants serious discussion.

We have seen how Anselm derives inferences as to what "cannot be thought" by insisting on the sharp distinction he draws between understanding the signification of words and understanding the thing itself to which a set of words refers. Whenever he writes that something "cannot be thought" he means that it cannot be thought in the sense that the thing itself cannot be *understood*.

Now the noun "understanding" can refer to:

(a) the ability to understand or think; it is regarded as one of the proper topics for the discipline of psychology;

(b) the state of understanding achieved by exercising that ability. It is standardly taken to be a mental state;
(c) the knowledge obtained by exercising that ability. It is standardly said to be the 'mental content' of the state achieved by exercising that ability.

A statement or thought is said to be true when the 'mental content' *corresponds* with something in reality. Debates continue amongst philosophers of mind over whether 'content' is 'narrow' or 'broad' – that is, determined entirely by a person's mental states, or determined in part by features of a person's environment.

Jacob Archambault comments:

> In contrast, earlier Medieval logic generally takes meanings to be neither objects nor impositions of subjects: meanings are something had by entities; and because of this, we may by an appropriate transference ascribe that meaning to a term referring to the entity.[34]

In support of that interpretation he quotes Boethius as writing:

> Whenever one thing partakes of another, this participation is given in the name as well as in the thing. For instance, a certain man, because he partakes of justice, draws near [to justice] really, and hence draws his name near as well: he is called just.[35]

In *Reply* 11, Anselm insists that it is a logical truth that what is understood is in the understanding, writing:

> *For just as what is thought is thought by thought, and what is thought by thought, insofar as it is thought is in thought, so what is understood is understood by the understanding and what is understood by the understanding, insofar as it is understood, is in the understanding. What is plainer than this?*

34 Archambault refers to Desmond Henry's comment in *The Logic of Saint Anselm*, p. 88 that: "Hence it here appears that for Boethius one could speak of things being asserted in a certain fashion (e.g. denominatively, paronymously)".

35 Boethius: *In Categorias Aristotelis libri quatuor*. In Migne, J.P. *Patrologia Latina* 64, 159–254.

He is referring here to the thing itself which is thought and understood, respectively.

Anyone who assumes that only 'mental contents' (whether 'narrow' 'or broad') can be thought will find such statements bewildering. How can *things* be "in thought" and "in the understanding"? Surely, it is said, the medievals are confusing objects and concepts. As a colleague said to me, "The concept of a tiger can be 'in' my understanding, if one must speak that way, but tigers live in jungles and zoos, not in the understanding".

As that objection shows clearly, only two factors are admitted: the concept which is a representation, and the object to which it refers. As I have argued elsewhere, a two-factor account like that cannot account for mis-representation and error.[36] For when the 'object' referred to does not exist, there is nothing for the representation to represent, and therefore the supposed representation is not a representation at all!

We saw in §3.8, however, that for both Anselm and Gaunilo "*intellegere*" (and its variant "*intelligere*") is a way of thinking which implies truth. It is one of a wide range of verbs which presume success. Something can only be *understood* if how it is understood to be is the *same* as how it actually is. The knowledge obtained by exercising the ability to understand is not, however, just a 'mental content' or a 'representation' which somehow *corresponds* with reality. Knowledge is attained when what is thought *is* what is real. To be adequate, any account of understanding must admit three factors:[37]

(a) the occurrence of something which serves as the representation;
(b) its content: what it signifies, that is, what it is understood to be a representation *of*, and
(c) the relevant external phenomenon which is the same as what that representation is *of* if and when that representation is true.

This is a *teleological* account. The relation of (a) and (b) is an 'internal relation', like the relation of the circumference of a circle to its radius. The relation of (b) to (c) is an external relation; if what is signified exists, then (b) and (c) are identical. On the other hand, if there is no relevant external phenomenon

36 I argue in Campbell, *The Concept of Truth*, that all accounts of truth in terms of 'correspondence' between a representation and something in reality are incoherent for that reason.

37 I argue that any adequate account of representation must admit these *three* factors in *The Concept of Truth*, ch. 6.

which can be identified as that which has been signified by (b), the representation is a mis-representation. It is false – and the purported representation is a mis-representation.

While this is a thoroughly modern account of understanding which appropriately acknowledges the intentionality of mental processes, it fully accords with what I take to be Anselm's account of these matters in *De Grammatico* and *De Veritate*. In the terminology of *De Grammatico*, (a) is a *vox*: a sound or written mark, whereas (b) is its *sensus*. That *sensus* typically has a signification (*significativum*) which is the thing (*res*) referred to by the common use of those words. The word *res* is used by both Boethius and Anselm in a broad sense to mean anything which can be talked or thought about; it might or might not be in reality. The relation of the *significativum* to reality is an external relation. When the *res* in question exists, then the statement or thought is true. As Anselm explained in *De Veritate*, if I say, "It is day" at midday, my statement is true, whereas if I make the same statement at night, what I have said is false; it does not signify as it ought. My purported understanding is a mis-understanding.

On this account, there is no *fundamental* gap between thought and reality. Human consciousness is not cut off from things-in-themselves, as Kant maintained. Anselm is right; we are *interacting* with other items in reality all of the time, and generally do so on the basis of what we perceive accurately enough. The evidence for our perceptions being accurate enough is that we keep surviving for a significant period of time. For if we generally and systematically misunderstood our surroundings, we would soon die from malnutrition. Consequently, while we regularly make mistakes – occasionally, very serious mistakes with disastrous consequences – we 'get it right' much more often than not. The point is that thinking is founded on experience, even when our imaginations take flight and put together in a fanciful way features of reality which do not exist together.

The very fact that we keep surviving is enough to show that we are continually and consciously engaging with realities beyond us. For we could not survive if we were not conscious of and interacting with our environment. Thus, it is necessary that some things we think of are in reality. So, it is not impossible, *in principle*, for Anselm validly to infer that something exists from considering what can be thought in the sense that the thing itself is understood. If anything in this area is out-of-date, it is the lingering inheritance of the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy. Once that mistaken pre-understanding is abandoned, the issue then becomes whether Anselm's deduction of Stage One is valid. I have demonstrated in Chapter 4 that it is.

6 Anselm's Views on Existing Contingently

We have seen that the principle underlying Anselm's proof is not some 'definition' of God, nor 'something like a definition', nor a 'conceptual truth' about God which is alleged to be known *a priori*. On the contrary, what enables Anselm to prove the existence of God is his Stage Three premise "Whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist", for, together with the conclusion of Stage Two, that premise, which encompasses the universe in its reference, entails the proposition which in Chapter 11 was identified as his *unum argumentum*: "You are something than which nothing greater could be thought".

When in *Reply* III Anselm responds to Gaunilo's criticism of his Stage One argument, he restates that argument by focussing on what is implicit in the Stage Three premise: that everything other than God is *able* not to exist. For, as we saw in §8.4, his Stage Three premise follows from that by applying his innovative Conceivability rule:

> It is valid to infer from "It is possible that *p*" that "It is possible to think that *p*", that is, "It can be thought that *p*".

That is why Anselm presents three arguments in *Reply* I all of which assume that if something does not exist, it could be thought not to exist, *even if it were to exist*. There is nothing untoward in that inference. It is implicit in the fact that – putting the issue of God's existence aside – everything of which we have any knowledge exists contingently.

That is evident in the first argument Anselm presents in the *Reply*: the one based on existing with a beginning and which was examined in Chapter 5 and found to be valid with justified premises. For whatever has a beginning does not exist at some time. So, it is possible that it does not exist at some other time. That follows by one of the simplest rules in modal logic: that it is valid to infer from "*p*" that "It is possible that *p*". So, whatever exists contingently is able not to exist, *even when it exists*. It then follows by Anselm's Conceivability rule that it can be thought not to exist.

The other two arguments in *Reply* I, which I construe as the two legs of a constructive dilemma, both have a premise which is about "Whatever can be thought but does not exist, even if it were to exist". One of the premises in the first argument says such a thing would be able not to exist, either in actuality or in the understanding. And in the second argument one of the premises says that such a thing could not be something than which a greater cannot be

thought – which he had already shown to be true in the argument based on existing with a beginning.

The fact that everything of which we have any knowledge exists contingently is more firmly established today than it was when Anselm wrote the *Proslogion* and the *Reply*. For we now know that those things we see in the sky are not necessary beings. That is as much a fact today as it ever was. Indeed, as will be discussed in §12.7, it is fashionable today to maintain that everything which exists, with no exceptions, is able not to exist.

However, having examined the arguments which Anselm presents in the *Reply*, David Smith says that "what Anselm offers us in the *Reply* is strikingly new when compared with the *Proslogion*".[38] He identifies the proposition, "If something does not exist, it could be thought not to exist, *even if it were to exist*" as one of two new theses. The other is the principle which Anselm asserts in *Reply* V:

> *What does not exist is able not to exist, and what is able not to exist can be thought not to exist.*

While neither of those two propositions occur explicitly in the *Proslogion*, I deny that they are new in the *Reply*. I have shown that the first is implicit in his Stage Three premise, and the second is the principle from which in §3.6 I derived his Conceivability rule. That rule licenses some of the most significant inferences in *Proslogion* II and III.

Nevertheless, Smith recognizes that these principles do imply that if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it would both have a nature which ensures that it does not meet any of the criteria for being thought not to exist, and it would exist. In this way, Smith eventually concedes that not satisfying the criteria which determine what can be thought not to exist is both necessary and sufficient for not being conceivably non-existent. He concludes from this that:[39]

> We can therefore determine, wholly *a priori*, by a consideration of a thing's nature alone, whether it can be conceived not to exist or not – without qualification.

I do not see that that follows. Whether a thing is able not to exist is indeed determined by its nature, but whether a thing has such a nature is an issue which can only be determined *a posteriori*. Once it has been discovered that

38 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, pp. 122–3.
39 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 124.

it has a nature which determines that it is able not to exist, it may then be inferred that it can be thought not to exist. But only the last move is *a priori*. But having written the sentence discussed, Smith suddenly declares the sceptical statement I quoted in the introduction to this chapter:

> This filling of the dialectical loophole in the *Proslogion* III argument is totally dependent upon Anselm's metaphysical views, which surface and inform the arguments in the *Reply* in a way that they do not in the *Proslogion*. These metaphysical views are, from a modern perspective, not only striking, but strikingly implausible.[40]

This is a startling assessment to emerge from his patient and thorough examination of Anselm's arguments in the *Reply* for the existence of something-than-which-a greater-cannot-be-conceived. We examined the first of those arguments in Chapter 5 and found it to be based on the perfectly acceptable concepts of having a beginning and existing contingently.

I have argued above that what Smith is calling 'Anselm's metaphysical views' are not at all implausible when assessed from a modern perspective. For Anselm does not base his arguments on discerning the natures of things *a priori*: that is the error perpetrated by attributing 'the ontological argument' to him, when in fact his proof of the existence of God is grounded on the contingent nature of the existence of everything else.

The methodology of modern science has to be empirical because everything it investigates exists contingently: they all are able to exist and able not to exist. That fact is the underlying metaphysical foundation of the practice of modern science. It is the corollary of the doctrine of creation. Anselm's proof works because of that concordance between his theology and the contingent nature of everything which we can observe. What is so persistently overlooked is that, as Foster has shown, *modern empirical science is the science of created natures*. Far from being "strikingly implausible" from a modern perspective, Anselm's proof is both valid and plausible because it exploits that concordance more effectively than anything else I have ever read.

I have discussed Smith's contrary assessment as it shows that even someone as thorough as he can misunderstand how Anselm proves that God truly exists because of the prevailing pre-understanding that it is a proof *a priori*. What is remarkable is not Anselm's inferring that everything other than God can be thought not to exist, even if it exists, but the fact that modern cosmology confirms that every observable thing which exists at some time in the universe exists contingently. Since it is impossible to have any *a posteriori* knowledge

40 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 124.

about anything else which might exist beyond the observable universe, that confirms Anselm's Stage Three premise. So far as our knowledge of things can reach, we know that everything which exists is able not to exist, and therefore that "All things can be thought not to exist, apart from that which is supreme".

7 The Significance of Kant's Refutation of the Ontological Argument

It was noted in §12.2 above that Descartes invented 'the ontological argument' for the existence of God in order to secure the possibility of *scientia*: knowledge of necessary truth. As explained there, he required that argument in order to secure the possibility of knowledge of necessities. He is standardly hailed as the father of modern philosophy, but, in fact, his objective was the last gasp of medieval philosophy.

It is important to reiterate that Kant's critique of the ontological argument does not apply to Anselm's proof. All the Cartesian arguments defined God as a being whose essence encompassed all perfections. Leibniz criticised Descartes' argument for not establishing that there are no contradictions amongst all those perfections. Kant took that criticism one step further: it is not enough to show that all the perfections are logically consistent; it must be established that they are mutually realizable. Kant famous dictum – that "Being" is not a 'real predicate' – is effective against the Cartesian arguments because if existence is one of the perfections, "exists" must be a *determining* predicate.

I have shown that Anselm's proof is nothing like these later Cartesian arguments. It does not begin with a definition. It begins with his uttering an indefinite description. But when Kant's dictum is properly understood as meaning that "is in reality" and "exists" are *not* determining predicates, his dictum is precisely what is needed to formulate a plausible definition of "greater than", as was shown in §3.3. Anselm was in fact anticipating Kant's dictum when he argued that the same thing which he supposed to be solely in the understanding can be thought to be also in reality, and that if it were it would be greater, not because it would be a different thing, but because to be in reality is better than not so to be.

Descartes' argument is nothing like that. Once he has contended that he cannot separate existence from the idea of God, he recalls that he is "always brought back to the fact that it is only what I clearly and distinctly perceive that completely convinces me".[41] Descartes remarks that his nature is such that so long as he perceives something very clearly and distinctly he cannot but believe it to be true. But that is not enough to guarantee that he will not

41 Descartes, *Meditation* v, trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, & Murdoch, II, p. 47.

fall into error. For his nature is also such that he cannot fix his mental vision continually on the same thing, so as to keep on perceiving it clearly. He finds that when he is not attending to the arguments which led him to make some previous judgement, doubts and confusion obscure what he had previously perceived clearly and distinctly. "And so", he says,

> … other arguments can now occur to me which might undermine my opinion, if I did not possess knowledge of God, and I should thus never have true and certain knowledge of anything, but only shifting and changeable opinions.[42]

This is why it is so important to him that it be *self-evident* that existence belongs to the essence of God. For it provides him with a way out of that predicament. He continues:

> Now, however, I have perceived that God exists, and at the same time I have understood that everything else depends on Him, and that He is no deceiver; and I have drawn the conclusion that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive is of necessity true.

That is the argument which Kant dubbed 'the ontological argument' over a century later.

What Descartes infers from his ontological argument is not only that God exists and is not a deceiver, but also that those implications are *necessary truths*. That enables him to affirm the general criterion of truth in a form stronger than before: what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true *of necessity*. At last he has attained what he needed to convert his subjective certainties into objectively necessary truths.

It is highly significant that Descartes has not written the word *scientia* since he mentioned it in the very first sentence with which he began his *Meditations*. But now, at the end of *Meditation* v, he is able to use it again in a nuanced paragraph in which he carefully distinguishes three different modes of knowing:

> Thus I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge [*scientiae*] depends uniquely upon my cognition [*cognitione*] of the true God, to such an extent that, I could not perfectly know [*scire*] any other thing until I discerned [*nossem*] Him. And now it is possible for countless things to be plainly discerned [*nota*] and certain to me, both concerning God, and other things whose nature is intelligible, and also concerning

42 *Meditation* v, p. 48.

> the whole of that corporeal nature which is the subject-matter of pure mathematics.

It can be seen that Descartes' demonstration of the possibility of *scientia* is utterly dependent upon the cogency of his ontological argument for the existence of God.

That is why Kant's refutation of what he called 'the ontological argument' had such far-reaching ramifications. It not only refuted Descartes' attempt to establish the existence of God, but it also demolished his attempt to reinstate a secure foundation for the sciences. The arguments devised subsequently by Leibniz and his followers – which may be referred to collectively as the 'Cartesian' arguments – were even more vulnerable to Kant's critique.

Without the essential metaphysical underpinning of the ontological argument, Descartes' demonstration of the possibility of obtaining that kind of knowledge of necessities which had been called *scientia* collapsed. Consequently, whereas the very possibility of *scientia* had been in doubt, it now appeared that there was no prospect of ever restoring it. Kant's solution to the ensuing problem was to declare that we have no knowledge of things 'in themselves'; our knowledge of them is of their appearances.

One consequence is that what reality is "in itself", which was the traditional domain of metaphysics, is beyond our understanding. In his view, what we receive from the world is a 'manifold' of sensations from which we construct an intelligible ordered world by applying concepts and names to it. A concept is a set of properties in virtue of which something counts as a certain kind of object, and a name is a label that stands for a uniquely identifying description of some particular thing. Accordingly the closest we can get to a fundamental understanding of reality consists of knowledge of the workings of our structures of intelligibility.

An implication of this view is that no objects have their properties *necessarily*. But by ascribing this role to the understanding Kant found a way of ensuring that the basic principles by which we order the 'manifold' of sensation are what we *bring to* experience and therefore are necessary *a priori*. Thus, arguing that space and time are frameworks innate to our ways of knowing – he called them 'the forms of intuition' – he proposed that geometry and arithmetic are synthetic truths known *a priori*, and thus, in a sense, necessary. What is necessary or essential to some object of experience is determined by how we choose to describe it, not some natural feature of the thing as it is in itself, independently of our interest in it.

Kant's devastating refutation of the Cartesian ontological arguments had profound consequences for the way philosophers thereafter have understood

the concepts of truth and knowledge. That radicalized the problem of the relation between the knower and the known, *in principle*. In the light of this 'Copernican revolution', as Kant called it, every prior position in the history of philosophy now seems to be 'pre-critical' and naïve, based on assumptions which can no longer be taken for granted. Whereas philosophy previously had uncritically assumed that it was possible to know what there is, and how things are, philosophy has forever lost its intellectual innocence.

8 A Proposal That Everything Exists Contingently

One of the few contemporary philosophers to appreciate fully how significant the historical developments sketched in §12.2 and §12.6 are for the way philosophy is practiced today is Quentin Meillassoux. In *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, he presents a penetrating analysis of the predicament of modern, that is, post-Kantian, philosophy. It would not be relevant to present a complete account of his views, but there are fascinating points of contact between some of his views and Anselm's which command attention.

In the course of that analysis Meillassoux engages in an interesting way with some of the same issues as exercised Anselm, such as what can be thought, the relation of thought to being, and what is necessary and what is contingent. That is quite arresting, because in arguing that everything exists contingently, he never mentions Anselm. Rather, his analysis of the problematic of modern philosophy accords the central role to Descartes' ontological argument.

Meillassoux starts his essay by insisting that we have evidence of how things were in the world before there were any humans to know anything about them. He claims that thought is capable of discriminating between those properties of the world which necessarily involve perceivers, such as the look of a red tomato, and those properties of the world as it is 'in itself', subsisting indifferently to whether they are perceived or not. But he acknowledges that that claim appears insupportable in the context of contemporary philosophy because such a view is resolutely *pre-critical*. He writes:

> It is an indefensible thesis because thought cannot get outside itself in order to compare the world as it is 'in itself' to the world as it is 'for us', and thereby distinguish what is a function of our relation to the world from what belongs to the world alone.[43]

43 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, tr. Ray Brasser (London, 2008), pp. 3–4.

Elaborating that point leads Meillassoux to observe that "the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of *correlation*".[44] By that he means "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thing and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other".[45]

Meillassoux analyses the many different ways in which philosophers nowadays have all accepted this problematic, but it is not germane here to discuss how he justifies that characterization of all post-Kantian philosophy, other than to note that he claims that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism.

However, he points out that empirical science is today capable of producing statements about events anterior to the advent of life as well as the advent of consciousness. With the development of precise dating techniques,

> Contemporary science is in a position to determine precisely – albeit in the form of revisable hypotheses – the dates of the formation of creatures living prior to the emergence of the first hominids, the date of the accretion of the earth, the date of the formation of the stars, and even the 'age' of the universe itself.[46]

Given these developments, he argues that we manifestly do have knowledge of things which are what they are independent of our knowledge of them.

Meillassoux is not the only contemporary philosopher to insist on this so-called 'realist' standpoint. Discussing the same issue from a logical point of view, and without Meillassoux' historical perspective, Saul Kripke has denied that the meaning of names determines what they refer to.[47] We do not refer to objects by organizing them into groups of properties, he argues; we simply designate them, such that a name names the same thing in all possible worlds, *including those in which the referent of the name lacks the properties we attribute to it*.

This point of logic undermines Kant's insistence that we have no knowledge of things 'in themselves'. There is no 'manifold' of sensation out of which we construct objects in accordance with the *a priori* forms of intuition – space and time – and the categories in terms of which our cognitive faculties order sensations. There are some real things 'out there' which we encounter, name,

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44 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 5.
45 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 5.
46 *After Finitude*, p. 9.
47 Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

and talk about. Accordingly, we are not separated from realities by our representations of them. That also implies that the understanding of the discipline of philosophy which has been derived from Kant – that we study and clarify concepts, meanings, and representations, all things that we have constructed, but not the world as it is in itself – is an unnecessarily restrictive way of understanding that discipline. On this Kripke and Meillassoux are in complete agreement, for all their differences on other issues.

Meillassoux's objective is to find a way to transcend the pervasive 'correlationism' which he finds in all the different branches of post-Kantian philosophy:

> Our task … consists in trying to understand how thought is able to access the uncorrelated, which is to say, a world capable of subsisting without being given. But to say this is just to say that we must grasp how thought is able to access an absolute, i.e., a being whose severance (the original meaning of *absolutus*) and whose separateness from thought is such that it presents itself to us as non-relative to us, and hence as capable of existing whether we exist or not.[48]

Meillassoux acknowledges that his objective seems like a return to Descartes' quest, but he asserts that that is not possible, since Cartesian argumentation has become irrevocably obsolete. Nevertheless, he says, we must begin by trying to understand the underlying reason for this obsolescence.

That directs him to examine Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God, for, as we saw, Descartes invokes that argument to provide the required guarantee of the existence, in an absolute sense, of extended substance – and hence of a domain which can be described in mathematical terms which do not presuppose any correlation with us humans as knowers.

Meillassoux claims that the invalidity of the ontological argument suffices to establish two ontological statements:

1. A necessary being is impossible.
2. The contingency of every entity is necessary.[49]

That "the contingency of everything is necessary" is a very striking thesis. That every observable thing in the universe exists contingently was introduced as a confirmed fact in Chapter 4, and asserted as the first premise of the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof. While that cannot be *proven* in the

48 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 28.
49 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 67.

sense of being deduced from premises known to be true *a priori*, it is a fundamental fact. But I did not go so far as to claim that that fact is necessary, nor would I. It is fascinating to find a contemporary philosopher engaging with exactly the same issues which exercised Anselm, but coming to a directly opposite conclusion.

However, Meillassoux's second thesis is plausible only if the first thesis is true. And the first thesis is true if the only way of establishing that there is a necessary being is some variant of the Cartesian ontological argument. That is the flaw in Meillassoux's argument. For not only Anselm, but Thomas Aquinas and others in the Thomist tradition, have arguments designed to establish the existence of a being which is unable not to exist where that is not inferred from claiming that "God does not exist" is self-contradictory. There is one sentence in which Meillassoux shows that he is aware that there are non-ontological arguments for the existence of God. He refers to:

> Judaeo-Christian theology's claim that its belief in a unique God is founded upon supposedly rational truths, all of which are anchored in the idea of a supreme being who is the prime mover of all things.

The mention of a 'prime mover' is clearly a reference to the 'second way' of Thomas Aquinas. That Meillassoux describes that argument as 'supposedly rational' is a sign that he does not accept that it is valid. I have already expressed my view that the kind of causal cosmological arguments by which Thomas Aquinas and others infer the existence of God are invalid because while "create" is a causal verb, creating is nothing like the varieties of causation we experience. Because the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof presented here does not try to infer the existence of a First Cause or a Prime Mover as the cause of the existence of everything else, it is much more plausible.

Meillassoux tries to justify his first thesis as follows:

> If we characterize a metaphysics minimally in terms of this kind of claim, that such and such an entity must absolutely be, culminates in the ontological argument, viz., in the claim that this or that entity must absolutely be because it is the way it is. The ontological argument posits a necessary being '*par excellence*' insofar as the essence of this being provides the reason for its existence – it is because God's essence is perfect that He must necessarily exist.[50]

50 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 32–3.

Meillassoux is right to say that the ontological argument posits a necessary being '*par excellence*' insofar as the essence of this being provides the reason for its existence. He continues:

> *only* the ontological argument … secures the existence of an X through the determination of this X alone, rather than through the determination of some entity other than X – X must be because it is perfect, and hence *causa sui*, or sole cause of itself.[51]

To repeat, Meillassoux's assertion that *only* the ontological argument secures the existence of such a being is the flaw in his argument. It is striking that Meillassoux is unwittingly replicating the vocabulary which I have used to explicate Anselm's proof when he speaks of securing "the existence of an X through the determination of this X alone, rather than through the determination of some entity other than X". For in Anselm's vocabulary that is exactly what he means by "exists through itself" [*est per se*] rather than "exists through another" [*est per aliud*]. Yet Meillassoux never mentions Anselm.

Anselm has validly deduced that God exists *per se*, but that deduction does *not* rely on the ontological argument, nor does he ever assert that God is *causa sui*.[52] He does indeed validly deduce in *Proslogion* V that God exists *per se* from the conclusions of his three-stage proof. But he infers that from having already established his conclusions in *Proslogion* III. While I have demonstrated that that three-stage argument never was a version of the ontological argument, what puts this issue beyond contention is that it also follows from our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof that God exists *per se*, as Anselm infers in *Proslogion* V, and as was shown in §11.9.

In the same passage Meillassoux says that the ontological argument is "the keystone which allows the system of real necessity to close in upon itself", and that "there is no legitimate demonstration that a determinate entity should exist unconditionally". That claim is false, because it has been validly demonstrated in §4.9 that:

> (4:53) It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

Meillassoux's claim is true *if and only if* the ontological argument is both legitimate and the *only* way of establishing that "a determinate entity exists

51 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 33. I have italicised 'only'.

52 That God is *causa sui* [self-caused] was argued by Spinoza, not Anselm.

unconditionally". The arguments presented in this book have demonstrated the opposite.

Of course, given the ubiquity of the standard misinterpretation of Anselm's proof, it would be quite unreasonable to expect Meillassoux to be aware that not only is Anselm's proof *not* a version of the 'ontological argument', but also that it is valid. Nevertheless, the hole in the case Meillassoux presents is the absence of any serious engagement with other ways in which it might be established that there exists a being whose mode of existence is necessary in Anselm's sense of being unable not to exist

There are two invalid steps in Meillassoux's assumption that the only way the existence of a necessary being could be proven is by some version of 'the ontological argument'. Firstly, as Anselm has shown in the *Proslogion*, it is not required that anyone should presume to know the essence of God in order to establish that God exists necessarily. As we have seen, Anselm disavows any attempt to penetrate the loftiness of God, and argues that since it is not possible that something can be thought to be greater than God, God is greater than can be thought. That is why it is such a misrepresentation to classify Anselm's proof as a version of 'the ontological argument', in the same category as the Cartesian 'proofs' which Kant has effectively refuted. Rather Anselm begins with an indefinite description which is a description *per aliud*, even when he identifies it as the God whom he is addressing, as was shown in §11.9.

Secondly, Meillassoux is assuming that the only way that the existence of a necessary being could be established is as the conclusion of some version of the 'ontological argument'. That is turn assumes that the only kind of necessity which a necessary being could have is the logical necessity which is entailed by the impossibility of a contradiction. The metaphysical basis of Anselm's proof is quite different from the logical necessity which is entailed by the impossibility of a contradiction. It is true that Anselm typically employs the *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument to infer his conclusions. To express the point in the terminology introduced into medieval logic centuries after Anselm, that inference only proves the *de dicto* necessity of the proposition "Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality". But that *de dicto* necessity is not the sense in which Anselm claims that God is unable not to exist. He is arguing that God exists as a *de re* necessity.[53]

I have demonstrated in §4.9 that what enables Anselm to deduce both his Stage One and Stage Two conclusions is the demonstrable fact that the phrase "something than which a greater cannot be thought" describes something

53 As will be shown in the following section, Anselm draws the same distinction in his *Cur Deus Homo*, but uses different terminology.

which is unable not to exist. That follows from the fact that every observable thing in the universe has a beginning, which entails that they all exist but are able not to exist.

That God is unable not to exist is not solely dependent on the argument in *Proslogion* II. Anselm himself demonstrated in *Reply* I that if something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to exist, it exists out of necessity, and that whether it is assumed that it exists, or that it does not exist, it follows that if it can even be thought, it is unable not to exist. Both those arguments were validated in *Rethinking Anselm's Arguments*, and the first was validated again in Chapter 5 by the premises of our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof. Anselm is able to prove that God is unable not to exist because He exists so intensely that it is not possible that any other power could destroy Him, or prevent Him from existing.

Anselm also demonstrated in *Reply* III that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist, as part of his response to Gaunilo's parody, as was shown in §7.8. And in *Reply* IX, despite Gaunilo's insistence that he could not think of *that thing* than which a greater cannot be thought, Anselm demonstrated that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist, and therefore that it exists. So Anselm's conclusions have been validated in multiple ways.

Anselm does *not* argue that "because God's essence is perfect, He must necessarily exist", although not a few commentators have attributed that to him. I keep emphasizing that Anselm renounces any pretentions to penetrate God's loftiness. I cannot read that in any other way than a *denial* of any knowledge of God's essence. This Anselmian argument does not try to establish that a necessary being exists by arguing that the *reason* why it exists is that the essence of this being is perfect. It infers the existence of a necessary being because, *ceteris paribus*, it is better for *any* being – including any being which exists contingently – to exist than not to exist. That is why a being which is unable not to exist is greater than all those other beings which have beginnings and ends and are composed of parts.

To support his position Meillassoux enunciates the following principle:

> There is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is; everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or, be able to be other than it is.[54]

54 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 60.

He calls this his 'principle of unreason', and describes it as an *anhypothetical* principle. He explains that he is using the term "anhypothetical principle" in Aristotle's sense: such a principle is so fundamental that it could not be deduced from any other, but which could be proved by an 'indirect' or 'refutational' argument.[55] Such a proof would have to be indirect, because there is no principle which is more fundamental from which it could be deduced. But it can be proven by pointing out the inevitable inconsistencies into which anyone who contests the truth of the principle is bound to fall. He claims that his principle of unreason is not only *anhypothetical*, but also *absolute*, because one cannot contest its absolute validity without thereby presupposing its absolute truth. So, he claims, it is possible to establish, through indirect demonstration, the absolute necessity of the contingency of everything.

This is yet another striking resemblance between Meillassoux and Anselm's arguments. For that indirect way of proceeding is precisely how Anselm establishes the conclusions of his Stages One, Two and Three. That indirect way of proceeding is also how those same conclusions have been established in our cosmological reformulation of his proof. A number of commentators suggest that this form of indirect argument is Anselm's 'favourite' form of argument. But that is a superficial comment. For Anselm, it is so *fundamental* a fact that God exists that His existence cannot possibly be proven in any other way than indirectly, by showing the absurdities and impossibilities which follow from supposing otherwise.

Now, Meillassoux's anhypothetical 'principle of unreason' is true provided its scope is restricted to the universe, because it is a fact that every observable thing which exists in the universe had a beginning. But, when his principle is asserted as the unrestricted universal which he intends it to be, that same fact entails that his principle is not just 'anhypothetical'; *it is false*. Far from it being proven in that way that everything exists contingently, it follows directly and validly from the fact that everything in the universe is able not to exist that it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *unable* not to exist, as was pointed out above.

I have engaged with Meillassoux's attempt to demonstrate the absolute necessity of the contingency of everything because his position is representative of the view of so many modern thinkers. That view is adopted not only by many – probably most – philosophers, but by very many people across a wide spectrum of modern life. Over the centuries, people have become so absorbed in their daily encounters with things which are able not to exist that their spiritual sensibilities have shrunk to the point where they can no longer make

55 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, pp. 60–61. He is referring to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005^b.

much sense of the idea that something might exist which is unable not to exist. It is no wonder that so many people nowadays find the very idea of 'a necessary being' puzzling and difficult to accept, even though the deduction of (4:53) – that "It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist" – is valid.

The virtue of the case Meillassoux presents is that he argues for it in a sophisticated and ingenious way, informed by his insights into developments in philosophy since the 17th Century. He is very watchful not to fall into dogmatism, and I commend the insights he brings to his analysis of the problematic which philosophy confronts right now. But he is also typical of many modern thinkers in dismissing too easily, and without justification, the unfashionable issue of the existence of God.

9 Existing Necessarily

Philosophers happily debate whether God is a necessary being without showing any sensitivity to the question of whether that is a proper description to attribute to God. In contrast, Anselm holds that saying that God is unable not to exist, and saying that God exists necessarily, are both true but improper ways of speaking.

Anselm does not explicitly claim that God is a necessary being, for reasons we shall see shortly. But since he does conclude that God could not be thought not to exist, it follows, by the contrapositive of his Conceivability rule, that God is unable not to exist. Also, I have drawn attention above to the two arguments in *Reply* 1, which establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.

Anselm has a very good reason for inferring that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and consequently God, could not be thought not to exist, but the reason why not is not just a matter of logical necessity. He makes that very clear in his later work, the *Cur Deus Homo*, where he draws two different distinctions concerning necessity. One is a matter of compulsion or prevention. *Cur Deus Homo* 11:17 is entitled: *In God there is neither necessity nor impossibility. There is a necessity which compels and a necessity which does not compel*. Concerning the first kind of necessity he says that:

> *For every necessity is either a compulsion or a prevention, and these two necessities are mutually exclusive, like necessity and impossibility. For whatever is compelled to be is prevented from not being, and what is compelled not to be is prevented from being, just as what is necessary to be is*

> *impossible not to be, and for what is necessary not to be is impossible to be, and conversely*.

He argues that God does not do anything by necessity *in that sense*, for nothing could compel or prevent God from exercising His will.

He then moves on to clarify some basic but different distinctions. The first is an application of the familiar distinction between the modal status of a valid inference and the modal status of its conclusion. He illustrates this distinction with an example. Suppose someone says that it was necessary for something to happen, because it was prophesied, and that prophecy turned out to be true. Anselm responds that that amounts to saying: "It was necessary for this to happen because it was going to happen". "But", he adds, "this sort of necessity does not compel something to be; rather, the being of the thing makes the necessity".

That analysis leads Anselm to distinguish between what he calls "antecedent necessity" [*necessitas praecedens*] which is the cause of a thing's existence, and "consequent necessity" [*necessitas sequens*], which brings about nothing and is itself produced. It is a matter of antecedent and effectual necessity when we say, "The heavens revolve because it is necessary for them to revolve". As he explains, the force of their natural state compels the heavens to revolve. But if I say, "You are necessarily speaking because you are speaking", I only mean that nothing can make it true that you are not speaking, at the moment you are speaking. I am not meaning that something compels you to speak. The other distinction is his way of expressing the familiar distinction between the modal status of a valid inference and the modal status of its conclusion.[56]

In his *Anselm's Other Argument*, David Smith draws attention to these passages, and comments that there is nothing in them which contains any suggestion that Anselm saw the truth or acceptability of statements which predicate something necessarily of God as having anything to do with what is logically necessary.[57] Rather, Anselm requires that there is always a power to ground such incapacities or any lack of power. Smith continues:

> The genuine necessity that is implied by the sentences that improperly attribute necessity to God is one that compels other things. And this compulsion must derive from something. What it derives from, of course, is God: specifically, from His "steadfastness" and power. But God must

56 Anselm's distinction between 'antecedent necessity' and 'consequent necessity' is his way of drawing the distinction between necessity *de re* and de dicto made by medieval logicians centuries later.

57 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 76.

> exist in order to possess such power. So according to Anselm the truth of the statement that God cannot not exist presupposes that God does actually exist – with consummate power.... The full Anselmian construction of "God exists necessarily" is: "God exists with such absolute power that everything is prevented from making it the case that God does not exist".

That is the sense in which it has been proven in our Anselmian cosmological argument that God is unable not to exist. It is nothing like the logical necessity which the Cartesian ontological arguments purport to deduce.

So, while God is unable not to exist, that is a truth improperly expressed, for God is not subject to any compulsion or prevention. While being unable not to be thought not to exist entails being unable not to exist, the former, not the latter, is the unique property of God, as he demonstrated in *Reply* IV.

It might be objected that because this cosmological argument adopts Anselm's indefinite description, "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought", it too is trapped within what Meillassoux calls 'the correlationist circle'. However, as we have seen, although this conclusion establishes a connection between thought and reality, the being whose existence is thereby established is *not* ontologically correlated with thinking.

Once something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has been identified as God in Stage Three of Anselm's proof, and is unique, that description firms in *Proslogion* IV into a definite description: "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought". But, as we saw in §11.9, although that definite description identifies its referent in relation to the limits of human thought, and thus signifies its referent *per aliud*, the genius of Anselm's argument is that that identification leads to a transcendence of that correlation of thought and reality. For the argument continues to establish that:

> *Therefore, Lord, not only are You than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also greater than can be thought.*

So, the God whom Anselm has proven to exist, because He alone is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought transcends all human thinking. The correlation between the being of God and human thinking has transformed belief into understanding as the existence of the one true God is revealed at the very limits of thought. But Anselm's reasoning is dynamic; it has a trajectory which not only impels it towards that limit, but points thinking beyond the domain of thought altogether. When Anselm's reasoning attains the most exalted object of thought which human understanding could ever grasp, the direction of its momentum indicates that the God than whom a greater cannot be thought is greater than can be thought, for He transcends all things.

CHAPTER 13

Some Concluding Reflections

It has now been demonstrated how the three-stage proof of the existence of God which Anselm presented in *Proslogion* II and III may be reformulated as a cosmological argument of a kind which is *sui generis*. Seen in that light, his proof has emerged as exhibiting in a quite remarkable way the concordance between a theology which understands God to be the Creator of all other things and a scientific practice which is based on the fact that every observable thing exists contingently, and is able not to exist. As I said in §12.6, modern empirical science is the science of created natures.

In this closing chapter I reflect on the intellectual journey I have travelled while writing this book. For I have discovered that his proof is not what I had taken it to be previously. When his proof is appraised in this new way, far from being a peculiar and antiquated relic of out-dated medieval metaphysics, it is remarkably prescient, for it resonates with issues of current concern. Not only is his proof valid, but the metaphysical views upon which that proof is based are confirmed by contemporary science and philosophy. That is why I think it proper to include the words "That God Exists" in the title of this book.

I begin this chapter with reflecting on the boldness of Anselm's claiming to have proven that the Christian God in whom he believes is the one true God who transcends all religions and cultures. I then return to reflect on the issue of how it is possible to prove that something is in reality in the light of what has been revealed by the explorations of his proof.

I shall then devote §13.3 to §13.4 to drawing out some implications of his understanding of faith and of how faith relates to understanding. For he did not conceive his proof as an exercise in logic, but as an expression of his spiritual quest, as he seeks a direct experience of God. Thereby he demonstrates how it is possible for faith and reason to co-operate in a way which challenges our prejudices.

The final section will pick up the analysis of eternity which Anselm struggled to work out in the *Monologion* and affirmed so confidently in the *Proslogion* in order to show how extraordinarily prescient is his analysis of eternity, for it is the only conception of God which is compatible with modern cosmology.

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1 Considering Some Implications of Anselm's Proof

The final conclusion of Anselm's proof of the existence of God in *Proslogion* III is:

> (8:46) Therefore, You alone have being most truly of all, and for that reason most greatly of all, because whatever is other [than You] does not exist so truly, and on that account has less being.

It is all too easy to belittle this final conclusion by responding dismissively, "Well, he would say that!". But it warrants spending some time to meditate on the magnitude and the audacity of that conclusion. This concluding chapter will begin with some reflections on the significance of that conclusion. In Chapter 10 it was shown that that conclusion is necessarily true. At least three different implications follow from that conclusion.

Firstly, he is claiming that the God who is described by the universal description "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" does indeed exist. We saw in §3.2 that John Demetracopoulos shown that that phrase is Anselm's way of formulating what had been universally acknowledged to be the supreme being. So Anselm has a valid and cogent proof which shows that that supreme being exists. As John Demetracopoulos has written to me:[1]

> The basis of Anselm's famous argument for the existence of God is the truth that "something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" is a concept which exists in everyone's mind.... Anselm accepts that everyone would accept this proposition because he found it ... in all kinds of authors (pagans and Christians, Platonists and Stoics, Latin and Greek, prose writers and poets), and because the *auctoritas* of Boethius as a logician offers 'God' as an example of a concept universally common in all languages.

To have proven that the God described by this universal concept exists is a significant achievement.

Secondly, Anselm is claiming that the God in whom Christians believe is the God to whom that universal concept refers, whether or not everyone understands that to be so. He has a valid and cogent proof which establishes that that supreme being is none other than the trinitarian God whom Christians

1 Personal communication, 29 August 2019.

worship. He had deduced that whatever is other than that God can be thought not to exist from the belief that the God in whom Christians believe is the maker of all other things. That demonstrates that it is impossible that some mind could think of something better than the God whom he is addressing, and that enabled him to infer that it is true unconditionally that "You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist"

Admittedly, Anselm does not explicitly say in *Proslogion* III that "You are God the Father Almighty, as described in the Nicene Creed". So, it might be argued that this second implication is at best *implicit*. But there is nothing indirect or covert in his use of the pronoun, "You". Anselm *explicitly* addresses the God in whom he believes as "You" in *Proslogion* I and the opening sentences of II. When in the second half of *Proslogion* III he resumes his prayer, he again addresses his conclusions to "You". He cannot be addressing anyone other than the God to whom he was praying in *Proslogion* I. Most of *Proslogion* IV is written in third-person discourse, but he again resumes addressing God as "You" in the last sentence in *Proslogion* IV. Thereafter, he consistently addresses the same God as "You" throughout the rest of the *Proslogion*. So, the God whom he proves to exist in *Proslogion* III is the same as the God to whom he says, in *Proslogion* XXIII:

> *You, God the Father, are this good; it is Your Word that is Your Son.*

I maintain that it is indisputable that throughout the whole of the *Proslogion* Anselm is addressing a God who is triune. Were someone to reply that Anselm's understanding of the God whom he is addressing grows as he argues his way through chapter after chapter of the *Proslogion*, I would, of course, agree. But while his *understanding* of God is growing, the *identity* of the God he is addressing does not change as the *Proslogion* progresses. From the beginning to the end of the *Proslogion*, the God whom he is addressing is the same Christian God in whom he believes.

But Anselm has proven even more than that! For he is claiming, thirdly, that the conception of God described in the Nicene Creed is the truest and the most exalted conception of a supreme being that any mind could ever think. Having established that "You exist so truly that You *could not* be thought not to exist", and that "Whatever is other than You *can* be thought not to exist", he deduces from those two conclusions that:

> *Therefore, You alone have being most truly of all, and for that reason most greatly of all, because whatever is other* [*than You*] *does not exist so truly, and on that account has less being.*

So, the God whom he has proven to exist has being more truly than anything else, for God has being maximally of all. That is a very strong claim: he is saying that the God in whom Christians believe is greater than everything else that humans have ever encountered or conceived. The argument reconstructed here can be read as claiming to prove that the God who is described in the Nicene Creed is the only genuine god, despite what other religions, other cultures, and other philosophies might say. However, lest anyone triumphally seize on that implication, I must immediately point out that that conclusion is seriously problematic.

For that consequence sounds shocking to modern ears. Nowadays, when there is such a manifest need for inter-faith tolerance, any such claim can all too easily be dismissed as dangerously arrogant. Over the centuries, grievous harm has been inflicted, and dreadful wars waged, allegedly in the name of the one, true God. Despite all the knowledge, technical skills, and sophistication which the human race has achieved, religious beliefs are still being invoked to justify mass slaughter and mindless destruction, although darker and baser motives have also been powerful forces driving the religious wars of the past and the present.

But the logic of Anselm's three-stage proof is impeccable. What makes that proof so powerful is that he is able to invoke the belief articulated in the Nicene Creed to prove that that God exists supremely. The Nicene Creed is the first unequivocal and official declaration that the God whom Christians worship is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thereby he has shown that it is *reasonable* for him, and other Christians, to claim that the Supreme Being is the God they worship. So, while Anselm's reference to that creed is implicit in the *Proslogion*, it entails the conclusion in *Proslogion* III that "You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist", and that enables him validly to deduce that "You alone have being most truly of all, and for that reason most greatly of all", that is, that the supreme being is the God in whom Christians believe.

However, that claim is both disputable, and is disputed by those who believe that the God they worship is *not* the God whom Christians worship. So the question arises: Is Anselm's proof compatible with the existence of the gods of non-trinitarian religions? The answer to that question has to be: Certainly not! As I argued in Chapter 11, because it has been demonstrated that Anselm's crucial Stage Three premise (8:23) is entailed by the first clause of the Nicene Creed, the logic of his proof entails that the God whom Anselm proves to exist could not be any god other than the Trinitarian God in whom he, and all of Christendom, believes.

But there is a different question which it is less easy to answer:

> Is it possible to construct a proof which is *parallel* to Anselm's proof which describes a god who is not the God described by the Nicene Creed, and in that way prove that that other God exists supremely?

The answer to that question has to be: Yes. It is possible to construct a proof along those lines. It would not be *Anselm's* proof, but an argument which would similarly prove that some other god who is also described as the Creator of all other things exists supremely. What is required is to replace the credal statement (8:11) with a different ultimate premise which says that "X is the maker of all other things", where the name, or a definite description, of some other god is substituted in lieu of "X". Judaism, from which Christianity emerged and whose sacred scriptures are the same as what Christians call "The Old Testament" is one prominent example. Another is Islam, which shares a common Semitic heritage with Judaism and Christianity. But while those two are the most prominent, the belief that there is a god who created all other things is a belief also shared by a number of other peoples, such as certain tribes of indigenous Australians who lived in that continent for tens of thousands of years prior to the British occupation of it.[2]

Why the answer to that second question has to be positive can be illustrated by one example. A Muslim who is so minded could accept Stages One and Two of Anselm's proof, but replace all the references to the God described in Nicene Creed with refences to the God Allah, who is described in the *Qur'an*. For in the *Qur'an* at 35.1 it is written that:

> Praise be to Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

So, instead of inferring (8:13) which says that "God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things" it could be inferred that:

> (8:13*) Allah is the Creator of all other things.

That proposition (8:13*) entails that "Whatever is other than Allah can be thought not to exist", and from that premise it could validly be deduced that "Allah alone has being most truly of all and for that reason most greatly of

2 For example, in the mythology of several language groups of the indigenous people of south-east Australia, Baiame (or Biame, Baayami, Baayama or Byamee) was the creator god and Sky Father.

all". That deduction would be strictly parallel to the way in which Anselm's conclusions about the God in whom Christians believe were deduced in §8.6 and §8.7, and in Chapter 10.

Likewise, since for Jews the Torah begins with "In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth", any Jewish believer could adapt Anselm's argument analogously, and deduce that YHWH Elohim so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist.

But while those two arguments would be *parallel* to Anselm's, neither would be the *same* as Anselm's argument. Their premises would be different, and their conclusions would be different. Furthermore, those conclusions are not compatible with his conclusions. So, the correct response to the question above is:

> The conclusions of *Anselm's* proof are *not* consistent with the existence of any God other than the One in whom Christians believe. Nevertheless, his proof could be reformulated so that from a conception of a god who is a creator of all other things, but not a Trinity, it could be proven in a similar way that that non-trinitarian God exists supremely.

What follows from the fact that valid arguments can be constructed each of which prove that a god who is described differently in each is nevertheless the Supreme Being who created everything else?

A cynical response would be to conclude that they all must be fallacious, since it is not possible that there can be more than one supreme being who created everything else. Indeed, this would be a more plausible way of arguing that Anselm's argument *proves too much* than Gaunilo's failed attempt to show that by telling the story of the Lost Island.

But that cynical response is not the only possible consequence of this outcome; a positive response is also possible. For each of those parallel proofs would validly entail that the God described in each of them is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Now, it has been demonstrated in §10.2 that:

> (10:25) It is necessary that only one existing thing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

That significant proposition is dependent upon only the four premises which entail Anselm's Stage One conclusion in the cosmological reformulation of his proof on Chapter 4: (4:1); (4:2); (4:5), and (4:6). (10:25) is not dependent upon any theological premises. From (10:25) it was deduced in §10.2 that:

(10:26) It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely.

So, when all such parallel arguments are placed side by side, each identifies the God which it describes with a single Supreme Being: *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Since it has been proved, independently of any theological considerations, that only one existing thing is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and that it exist supremely, only one conclusion can validly be inferred. It follows by the transitivity of identity that:

> Despite being described in incompatible ways, all those gods who are described as the Creator of all other things are the very same being [*id ipsum*] who is that than which nothing greater could be thought.

That surprising conclusion is what the logic of Anselm's proof implies. There can be only one Supreme Being who is understood by different religions in different ways. Once again, the logic of Anselm's argumentation has resolved the paradox which was threatening to be a devastating refutation of that proof.

This issue highlights the importance of taking seriously Anselm's insistence that what he has proven concerns *what is spoken of*, and the fact that he deduced his conclusions about God in second-person discourse. For while those conclusions have been proven they are still beliefs which have been deduced from beliefs. The same would be true of any parallel arguments which might be mounted to prove the existence of some other God who is also believed to be the Creator of all other things.

Recognizing that the premises and the conclusions of these parallel arguments are *beliefs* – albeit proven beliefs – implies that adherents of each religion have the strongest of reasons to exercise the principle of tolerance with respect to those people who believe in some other God. They can accept that those people who also believe in a Creator describe their God in a way which is not compatible with their own beliefs, and acknowledge that, despite that incompatibility, those others are referring to the same God as the God they claim as their own.

2 How Something Described in Terms of Thought Can Be Proven to Exist

It has emerged that Anselm's proof is a *sui generis* form of what is called 'the cosmological argument for the existence of God' because it is not based on the proposition that "Everything which begins to exist is caused to exist", as

they are. But Anselm's proof is also *sui generis* in another sense. For it, and the variants of Stage One which Anselm presented in *Reply* 1, are unique in that they are cogent only in the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. For they demonstrate that, in this unique case, it can be proven that something is in reality from a description which says that there is a limit to what can be thought. That cannot be proven in the case of anything else.

I am not going to rehearse here again why the objection that nothing can be proven to be in reality from its being in thought cannot be sustained. I dealt with that in §2.1 and in Chapter 5. It has been demonstrated that, in the special case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, it can validly be deduced that if it can be thought to exist, it exists necessarily, and that if it can even be thought, that suffices to prove that it is unable not to exist.

But there is a subtler way of restating that objection. The phrase which is so central to his proof describes something in terms of there being a limit to what can be thought. I argued in §3.4 that it is false that necessarily, for everything, a greater thing can be thought and therefore:

(3:1) It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

From that, it follows. By Anselm's Conceivability rule, that *it can be thought* that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.

Despite those arguments in *Reply* 1, it does seem counterintuitive that it is possible to prove that something which is described purely in terms of there being a limit to what can be thought to be in reality. That is the real sticking point for so many who have come across Anselm's argument, from Gaunilo to the present day. Pointing out that Anselm's Stage One argument is valid, and that his *Reply* 1 arguments are valid, seems not to be enough to overcome that resistance. It is too deeply entrenched.

I explained in Chapter 2 that it was because I acknowledge how entrenched is that resistance that I began to search for ways of reformulating Anselm's proof so that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is proven to be in reality, without that conclusion being inferred from its being in the understanding. Once I had found a way of doing that, I knew that the following two stages of his proof would entail that God truly exists, as he said his *unum argumentum* would demonstrate. However, I suspect that reformulating Anselm's Stage One argument to remove all reference to 'being in the understanding' will not be enough to overcome the sceptics' resistance. As a way of confronting that challenge, it is helpful to ask: Why are they so adamant?

Well, it could never be proven that anything in the whole universe is in reality from the mere possibility of thinking of it. The sceptics are right about

that. For there is absolutely nothing in our everyday experience which would even *suggest* that that is possible. But that impossibility is not just a matter of lack of experience. Anselm's Stage Three premise implies that the universe and everything in it can be thought not to exist. For something which can be thought not to exist could not be something which *necessarily exists in reality.* I submit that that is why it seems counterintuitive that something described in terms of thought could ever be proven to be in reality.

However, Anselm would wholeheartedly agree with that. That is why he rejected Gaunilo's attempt to invalidate his Stage One argument by producing the counter-example of the Lost Island. The three reasons he gave in *Reply* III for rejecting Gaunilo's parody are effective precisely because they show that the case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unique. His three responses were demonstrated to be sound in Chapter 7. So, the uniqueness of Anselm's proof has itself been proven.

"But", I hear the sceptics say, "while I understand why Anselm has claimed that his proof is unique, I still cannot understand how is it possible to prove that something is in reality when all we are given is that there is a limit to what it is possible to think. How could that inference from thought to reality ever be credible? The most that he can claim is that if this thing is thought, it cannot be *thought* that it is not in reality, but that does not establish that it actually *is* in reality."

However that is a logical mistake. Anselm's Conceivability rule, which was identified in §3.8, says that it is valid to infer from "It is possible that *p*" that "It is possible *to think* that *p*", that is, "It can be thought that *p*". I cannot think of any reason why that rule should not be accepted as valid. That rule validates as a logical truth that "If it is possible that *p*, it can be thought that *p*". Since the contrapositive of any implication is equivalent to the original, it is also a logical truth that "If it cannot be thought that not-*p*, it is not possible that not-*p*". So, if it is conceded that Anselm has proven that "If it cannot be thought that this thing is not in reality", it follows by that logical truth that "It is not possible that this thing is not in reality". That is, "It is necessary that it actually is in reality".

This is where it becomes so important to recognize Anselm's rule of inference which says that what can be thought is grounded in what is possible, and what is possible is grounded in what is so. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not locked away within the domain of thought, never to escape, because *everything* we can think of is drawn from what we know to be so from our experience of the world in which we live.

No matter how outlandish a thought might be, it can never be *entirely* disconnected from reality. For example, we can think of a unicorn, even though none has ever existed, because we have seen horses and we have seen animals

with horns. We can put those elements together and envisage what a unicorn would look like if ever we were to encounter such an animal.

Anselm is making that same point when in *Reply* VIII he explains how any rational mind can ascend in thought by thinking of some things which are better than some other things, until it comes to think of something which is so good that it is not possible to think of something better. That passage was introduced in §2.5, and in §3.3 two key premises were extracted from it: a definition of "greater than" and the premise that, "*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good".

In this passage Anselm is not just putting this ascent in thought on display. He is inviting every one of us to enact each of the steps in our own thinking, for that is the only way we can come to understand the concept he infers. Accepting Anselm's invitation and enacting each step in our own thinking, we can come to understand how it is possible, in the unique case of something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, to infer that it is in reality from its being thought.

In *Reply* VIII, having observed that any rational mind can think that some things are better than others, and yet others are better still, Anselm then asks:

> *Indeed, who – even if he should not believe that what he thinks of is in reality – cannot think that, if something which has a beginning and an end is good, there is a much better good, which, although it begins, nevertheless does not cease?*

Of course, having a beginning is true of every observable thing which ever exists for some time in the universe. Anselm is asking: While many of those things are good, is not something which has a beginning, but not an end, even better? He believes that some such things do exist – angels and the immortal souls of human beings – but we do not need to be distracted into debating whether his belief is true, for he is inviting us to do no more than *think* that there might be things which have a beginning, but not an end. He is inviting us to agree that when we think of such things we are thinking of things which are better than all those things which have a beginning and an end. Why would they be better? Because, having begun to exist, they would never cease existing. Implicit in that answer is the thesis that it is better to exist than not.

Anselm then invites us to take the next step up in this ascent in thought by asserting that:

> *And just as the latter is better than the former, so that which does not have an end or a beginning is better than the latter, even if it should pass from the past through the present into the future.*

If it is indeed better to exist than not, to exist without a beginning or an end would be even better than having a beginning but never ceasing to exist. But if any things exist which have neither a beginning nor an end, they would be better than all those things which exist in the universe. Anselm is careful not to claim at this stage that there exists any such thing outside the universe. Before he invites us to take the next step higher, he repeats what he said at the beginning of this ascent in thought: it is possible to think of such things whether or not something of this kind is in reality. With that, the next step follows:

> *And whether or not something of this kind is in reality, that which in no way is in need, nor is thought to be changed or to be moved, is very much better than it*.

It is important to note that the verbs "change" [*mutari*] and "move" [*moveri*] are in the passive voice. Anselm is proposing that it is possible to think of something which so great and so powerful that not only would it not have either a beginning or an end, but also it would not be deficient in any respect, nor would anything be able to make it change or move. Having introduced something which would be even better than something which is thought to be everlasting, Anselm challenges Gaunilo and his readers with a series of questions:

> *Can this not be thought? Or can something greater than this be thought? Or is not this to infer that than which a greater cannot be thought from those than which a greater can be thought?*

He implicitly answers those questions himself, by concluding

> *And so from this than which a greater could not be thought could be inferred*.

To think of such a thing is to think of something which is at the very limits of what it is *possible* to think, for it is not possible to think of something which could be better. Because he is responding to Gaunilo who has presumed to speak on behalf of the Fool, Anselm has argued that it is possible to think of such a thing whether or not it is in reality. But obviously, since thinking cannot think of anything greater, the next question to ask is:

> Is it possible that something which is thought to be always in reality, and is thought not to be deficient in any respect, but to be so powerful that nothing could change or move it, is nevertheless not in reality?

That question requires a "Yes" or "No" answer. As was noted above, everything in the universe can be thought not to exist, because every such thing has a beginning. But it was shown in Chapter 4 that something which is at the very limits of what it is *possible* to think cannot be one of the things which exist for some time in the universe, because it cannot be thought to have a beginning or an end. Either that thing is not in reality at all, or it is in reality, but is not one the myriads of things which exist in the universe.

The first point to make in addressing those two alternatives is that to think of that which is at the very limit of what it is *possible* to think, is to think of something which is thought to be in reality. It cannot be thought not to be in reality because it is thought to exist without beginning to exist, and without ceasing to exist. Anselm's Conceivability rule implies that if cannot be thought not to be in reality, it is necessary that it is actually in reality.

To put this inference another way, since it is not possible to think of anything greater, thinking can only reflect upon the steps it has ascended to reach this apex. The climb has revealed what is involved in being greater. At each step higher, some positive and simple feature was thought to be true of a thing which made it better than the things contemplated on the step below because that feature was thought not to be true of the latter. That observation was encapsulated in the definition of 'greater than' introduced in §3.3. That definition becomes the third premise of the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof.

Significantly, as the ascent comes close to the apex, the additional feature which made one thing better than another was that it was thought to exist when the latter was thought not to exist. Clearly, other things being equal, to exist is better than not to exist. I argued in §3.3 that the reaction of people in all cultures to events, both good and bad, shows that that simple proposition is true. That proposition, gleaned from this ascent in thought, becomes the fourth premise of the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof.

Those two premises are all that is required to establish that if something were not to be in reality, it would not be as great as it would be if it were in reality. So, arbitrarily selecting a singular term to represent anything of that kind, it is possible to *think* that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality. But if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* in reality, as the sceptics suppose, it would be something than which a greater *can* be thought. But, as Anselm rightly says, "Certainly, this cannot be". So it follows that it is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality. That is, it is *necessary* that it is in reality. That is how it is possible to infer that a thing which is described as being at the very limits of what can

be thought is in reality. For ultimately it is reality which constrains what it is possible to think.

Not only are there limits to what can be thought in general, but there are also limits to what modern science can establish. If our knowledge of how things are has to be based on observation, as modern science decrees, it is not possible to *prove* any unrestrictedly universal propositions. Even if a large number of cases have been observed which confirm some universal hypothesis, and no exceptions have ever been found, it always remains possible that a falsifying instance can be observed. So while scientists can feel that some of their theories are *certain*, strictly speaking, they are at best *highly probable*. That is one of the limitations of modern science.

Another limitation, significant for this cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof, is that physics cannot say whether the universe as a whole had an absolute beginning. Our best explanation of the physical nature of the universe as it is now, including the observations which indicate that it is expanding at an increasing rate, imply that there was a time when the universe was very small, very hot, and very dense. The equations can be extrapolated backwards until they reach the value "zero", but according to the General Theory of Relativity, on which modern cosmology is based, there is no time when the value of the variable "*t*" is zero. Cosmological theory implies its own limit.

So, whether the universe had an absolute beginning is a question which the science of physics cannot answer because cosmology implies that there never was a time when the universe did not exist. Nevertheless, it is possible to think that the answer is "Yes", because those equations can be understood to imply that the backwards extrapolation must be finite. As I concluded in §4.3, that answer is not a statement of physics, but of meta-physics.

These reflections about modern science confirm Anselm's claim that there is a limit to what can be thought. That confirmation is dependent entirely upon the character of modern science. But these reflections also suffice to demonstrate that thinking can extend beyond the limits of what modern science is able to establish. We all know how wild thinking can become, but when adventurous thinking respects the rules of valid reasoning it can deliver definitive answers to some questions which we can ask but which science cannot answer. The question of whether it is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality is precisely such a case. For it has been proven that the answer to that question is: No.

3 Anselm's Understanding of "Faith"

As I have returned from time to time to explore Anselm's text, I have kept finding aspects I had not noticed earlier. Bernd Goebel's challenge to my previous

interpretation of Stage Three has led me not only to a quite new understanding of how Anselm proves that God exists, but also to a new appreciation of how strong are the connections between his faith and his reasoning; they are inseparable.

What the investigations reported in this book have revealed is that Anselm's faith both drives his reasoning and identifies the path along which he can reason his way to an understanding of what he believes. Although his reasoning is rigorous, nevertheless it is his faith which opens up that path.

That faith and reason could be so closely intertwined poses a direct challenge to the prevalent modern assumption that faith is inimical to reason, and vice versa. As Eileen Sweeney has observed:

> There are real divisions in the interpretation of Anselm.... Philosophers and systematic theologians carry off parts of his corpus, while those interested in spirituality take others.... One of the most vexed questions in Anselm scholarship is its disciplinary location. Though the question of whether Anselm's work is philosophy or theology is ultimately anachronistic, the extreme positions that have been taken on this question reveal something about how incompatible the elements of Anselm's corpus seem to modern sensibilities.[3]

That the spiritual and rational elements of Anselm's thinking should seem so incompatible is another consequence of the intellectual developments in Western thought which were sketched in Chapter 12. For the modern hangover of Cartesian dualism has meant that faith is now regarded as a purely subjective state – an emotional commitment which cannot be objectively verified.

On the side of the Cartesian dichotomy opposite to subjectivity, reason has become so 'objective' that it has become independent of any actual reasoning by some person. The consequence is that there is widespread scepticism as to whether in many domains truth is even attainable, to the point where appeals to reason are met with suspicion and relativised as just "your opinion". In certain quarters, reason has lost its power to persuade. All too often, what is cited as a reason is dismissed as nothing more than the rationalization of someone's opinion, which is presented as "rational" simply to disguise that person's self-interests.[4] We hear daily of evidence being dismissed as "fake news", manipulated to make a contrary view appear plausible. The commonly heard mantra is: "Anyone is entitled to their opinion", which is twisted to mean that any opinion is as valid as any other.

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3 Eileen Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word*, pp. 6–7.

4 A contemporary example which could have dire consequences is the current debate about the reality and significance of climate change.

But for the intellectual tradition which Anselm inherited from Boethius, *fides* [belief] is not divisible into a subjective state of belief and an objective alleged fact, as the Cartesian dichotomy requires. Consider Cicero's definition of *argumentum*, which was quoted and endorsed by Boethius, and cited in §11.7:

> An argument is a reason which produces belief regarding a thing in doubt.
>
> [*argumentum autem rationem, quae ratio rei dubiae faciat fidem*].[5]

Boethius comments on Cicero's definition that:

> There are many things which grant *fides*, but since they are not *rationes*, neither can they be *argumenta*: for instance, sight grants *fides* to things seen, but because sight is not a *ratio*, neither can it be an *argumentum*. He assumes one difference, that which grants *fides*, since every *argumentum* grants *fides*.[6]

The key to understanding this use of *fides* is Boethius' saying that "sight grants *fides* to things seen". For when I see something, my seeing it *grounds* what I have come to know about it. It is the grounding of that knowledge which Cicero and Boethius are calling *fides*. As Jacob Archambault observes, *fides* can be brought about both by *argumenta* and by other means, such as sight, and is not antithetical to *ratio*, since some *rationes* – namely, *argumenta* – grant it. He says that:

> Just as *visus* [sight] grants *fides* to visible things, so *rationes* grant *fides* to intelligible things; and *fides* is not granted to the skeptical inquirer, but to the thing inquired about. This last point is of vital importance: for Anselm and the Boethian tradition leading up to him, the granting of *fides* essentially concerns the matters themselves, not subjective mental states. Faith as a state of belief must follow from this either derivatively, from grasping the object at hand as it is really presented; or alternatively,

5 Cicero: *Topica*.

6 Boethius: *In Topica Ciceronis* 6, quoted in Archambault 'The Teaching of the *Trivium* at Bec and its Bearing on Anselm's Programme of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*' (Forthcoming). Archambault leaves several key terms untranslated to encourage the reader to think these terms from the manner and context in which they are employed, rather than bringing a prior notion to the reading of the text.

> the faith of a believing subject may be construed as a special case of this object-level participation.[7]

Belief in the sense of a subjective mental state, is secondary and derivative from the sense in which Boethius speaks of *fides* [faith]. Since the granting of *fides* is nothing psychological or linguistic, Archambault says that "what we have here is rather a condition for 'assertibility'". He suggests that a good translation for *fides* in this context would be "something like reliability, or even, bring out the ontological tenor a bit more – groundedness".[8]

Given the conceptual connection between *fides* and the verb *credere* [to believe], I suggest "credibility" as an even more appropriate translation. So when Anselm begins *Proslogion* II by addressing God as "You who grant understanding [*intellectum*] to faith [*fides*]", he is using the word *fides* with the nuances described above. For Anselm has confessed that although he *believes* in God, he does not *understand* that God is *as* he believes or is *what* he believes. He is asking that he be granted reasons which will enable him to understand why his beliefs are credible.

Anselm's need to understand is made all the more urgent by his remembering the Fool's denial, because that challenge not only throws doubt upon all his beliefs, but also upon the vocation to which he had committed his life. No wonder his search to find a reason which would assure him of the credibility of his beliefs caused him such distress, as he himself admits in the Preface, and as Eadmer reports in such vivid detail. Although Anselm recognizes that the Fool's denial challenges the rationality of devoting his life to the service of God as a monk, his faith in God never wavers. He does not park his faith as he sets out to disprove the Fool's denial. On the contrary, it is what drives him to construct that proof.

So, when in the Preface Anselm lists all the objectives which his *unum argumentum* would fulfil, what he is foreshadowing is that the proposition "You are something than which nothing greater could be thought" is the *reason* which will grant credibility to all those beliefs. He was right. That proposition has proven to be the key which unlocks his mind, and enables him to demonstrate the credibility of what was thrown into doubt by the Fool's denial.

What is extraordinary about Anselm is the way he fuses his spiritual quest with a finely-tuned sense of logical rigour. I emphasized in Chapter 8 how his formulating the argument in Stage Three as second-person discourse is not

7 Archambault, 'The Teaching of the *Trivium*', p. 12.
8 Archambault, 'The Teaching of the *Trivium*', p. 14.

just a stylistic affectation, but is what enables him to establish the identity of the God whom he is addressing so early in the *Proslogion*. But that is true of almost all of the text. Only in Stages One and Two is Anselm's reasoning not addressed to God, but that is because the existence of God is in doubt as a result of his taking the Fool's denial so seriously. But even there Anselm is motivated by his belief in God, for that is why he sets out to establish that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought has a property which is a distinctive property of God.

Having proven that something-than-which-a-greater cannot-be-thought is "You, Lord our God", and that therefore "You so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist", Anselm reiterates those conclusions in third-person discourse in *Proslogion* IV. He then sets the style for what follows by writing the question he asks at the beginning of *Proslogion* V:

> *What therefore are You, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought?*

As was shown in §11.10, Anselm is not doubting that the God whom he is addressing is "than whom nothing greater can be thought". He is asking what can be said of God in a non-relative way, for relational descriptions of God do not describe the divine substance. Thereafter, he invokes either that relational description, or the implication he infers from it in *Proslogion* V – that "You are whatever it is better to be than not to be" – to confirm his substantive beliefs about God.

I emphasize this because what it shows is that throughout the whole of the *Proslogion* it is not possible to draw the slightest distinction between his reasoning and his beliefs. Along with the novelty and ingenuity of his proof, that he presents an argument – not only for the existence of God, but also for what "we believe" about Him – in the discourse of prayer is the most innovative and startling aspect of his 'little book'.

4 Anselm's Journey from Belief to Understanding

It cannot be overemphasized just how significant it is that Anselm begins with the long outpouring of distress and yearning which constitutes *Proslogion* I. The whole of the *Proslogion* is the text in which he records his quest to attain direct knowledge of God, not just knowledge *about* Him. His famous proof is not just preparatory to that quest; it is the *first part* of that journey. It was noted in §1.2 that he draws that prayer to a close by writing:

And indeed, I do not seek to understand, so that I might believe,
but I believe so that I might understand.
For I also believe this:
that unless I believe,
I shall not understand.

It has been a surprise to me to discover just how literally Anselm meant that he *could not* understand that God exists unless he derives that new understanding from his beliefs. It was too easy to read that passage as a mere expression of piety, rather than as a signal to his readers as to *how* he would demonstrate all the objectives which he stipulated that his *unum argumentum* would fulfil. Gregory Schufreider comments on the passage quoted:

> In the midst of all the praying we will eventually have to discern the nature of the rational apology that the text is designed to provide: not just the standard theological apologetic, in which reason presumably defends the beliefs of the faithful but, on the contrary, an apology in which the articles of faith are used to defend the practice of reason for a faith seeking rational understanding.[9]

That is the remarkable feature of Anselm's argumentative strategy. His beliefs provide the reasons which grant credibility to his beliefs. Put like that, it might seem that he is reasoning in a vicious circle, which is never valid. But his strategy is much more subtle than that. For he uses his beliefs to prove that God exists in two different ways.

Having begun *Proslogion* II with asking God to grant that he may understand "*that You are* [or: exist] *as we believe, and that You are what we believe*", he specifies "what we believe":

(B) *And indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought.*

That is the first belief which enables him to prove that God exists. Although that belief is not the first premise of his proof, it proves to be fundamental in another way. As I explained in Chapter 11, his three-stage proof is constructed by extracting each of the referring expressions from (B) in turn. The first way he uses his beliefs to prove that God exists is manifest in the three-stage proof articulated in *Proslogion* II and III.

9 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 111.

The second way he proves the same conclusions is in the *Reply* where he grounds Stages One and Two on the cosmologically significant fact that:

> *All those things, and only they, which have a beginning or an end or are a conjunction of parts – as I have already said, whatever does not exist somewhere and at some time as a totality – could be thought not to exist.*

As was shown in Chapter 9, something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not satisfy any of those criteria, but Anselm's claim that only one thing does not satisfy those criteria was found to be justified in the *Monologion*, and to presuppose that the Supreme Nature exists and is the Creator of everything else. However, it was proven in §10:2, without relying on those presuppositions, that:

> (10:25) It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.

That significant proposition is dependent only upon the four premises which suffice to establish the conclusions of Stages One and Two. It was then proven from (10:25) that:

> (10:70) It is necessary that God the Father Almighty is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.

The only additional premise required to deduce that crucial conclusion was (54): that "It can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things".

(10:25) also entailed that (10:33), that "It is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist" and supplied what was required to validate (9:14): "It is necessary that all things can be thought not to exist, apart from that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which exists supremely". (10:70) then enabled it to be inferred from (10:33) that:

> (10:71) It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.

In this book I have demonstrated the truth of two fundamental theses:

(a) That it is provable that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, *independently* of whether it is in the understanding.

(b) That it is provable from (a) and the fact that it can be thought that God is the Creator of everything else, that He alone is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, and therefore so truly exists that He could not be thought not to exist, without those conclusions being *dependent* upon any of Anselm's beliefs.

Those two theses are derived from the belief Anselm has expressed in (B) by using it as a *resource*, instead of a *premise*. As I showed in §11.7, he begins his proof in the *Proslogion* by extracting the descriptive phrase from that belief and proves that it needs nothing else to establish its own existence, indeed that it exists so truly that it could not be thought not to exist. In the cosmological reformulation of his proof, that same conclusion was validly deduced in Chapter 6 from the four premises which in Chapter 4 entailed his Stage One conclusion. That establishes the thesis (a).

The thesis (b) is established by his returning to the sentence (B) to extract the pronoun "You" in order to invoke one of his fundamental beliefs: that the God whom he had been addressing is the Creator of everything else. That enables him to prove that that the belief expressed in (B) is true. So, that belief has been converted from being a mere belief which he did not understand into a proven truth. For he validly deduced that what he had proven in (a) is necessarily true of God. That belief has turned out to be the *unum argumentum* which "needs no other to prove itself than itself alone" and which demonstrates, "needing no other, that God truly exists".

Reflecting on what I have been able to glean from exploring the power of Anselm's intellect, and the honesty and integrity of his faith, and how ingeniously he holds his reasoning and his faith together, I judge that the way he summarized his own achievement is exactly right. No-one who understands his *unum argumentum* – that "You, Lord our God, are something than which nothing greater could be thought" – can think, with understanding, that God does not exist.

This is the final step in his proof. Whereas he had asserted his conclusion as the double negative – God *cannot* be thought *not* to exist – he now transposes that first negation from the passive to the active voice. It is impossible for anyone who understands *that which God is* – that is, whoever understands

what that thing itself is – can think that He does not exist. Once more, it is Schufreider who sees the point most clearly:

> When "that which it itself is" is entertained in thought, our thinking is impelled to think as it does by the reality itself and is not free to conceive it as not existing. In intuiting the thing itself in the vision of our thinking, its conception in the mind is determined by the direct impression on thought of the truth of what appears, or at least, is glimpsed in and through the radical distinction of P3.[10]

Of course, it is still the case that the cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof which I have presented relies crucially on the concept of what can, and what cannot, be thought. We humans have the freedom and creativity to range widely in our thoughts, to generate new ideas, to intuit what we are unable to prove, to contemplate situations both realistic and those which might turn out to be impossible, indeed, to think the most fantastic thoughts. But what it is possible to think, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, is constrained by what can be understood. Anselm's logical principles concerning what can be thought in that way are very strict.

That is the role of reason: to discipline the unruly prodigality of thought. Reason does that by imposing rules on what can be thought in order that truth is preserved when one proposition is inferred from another known or supposed to be true. Anselm's Conceivability rule permits it to be inferred that something 'can be thought' *provided* it is possible. And he endorses the generally accepted rule which permits it to be inferred that something is possible *provided* it is so. For adhering to those rules is the way to ensure that any conclusions inferred from truths are themselves true. That is why there have to be limits to what can be thought with understanding.

On this basis, not every sentence which can be formulated with grammatical correctness can be thought. The sentence "this circle is square" can be thought in the sense that that sentence is grammatically well-formed, and it is easy enough to understand what each of the words in that sentence mean. So, in that loose sense, this sentence can be thought. But that sentence cannot be *understood*, for it is impossible that a circle is square, and what is impossible cannot be in reality.

Setting aside our preconceptions, and reading Anselm's text with an open mind, he challenges us to think through, with him and with understanding, what is entailed by the description, "something than which a greater cannot

10 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 186. The 'radical distinction in P3' is, of course, that between the Creator and everything else.

be thought". When we do – if we do – we will come to understand that it exists so truly that it could not be thought not to exist, and therefore that it exists supremely.

No-one finds it easy to think such a double negative. But our cosmological reformulation of Anselm's proof begins with the fact that everything which we can observe does not exist at some time. Because every such thing both exists and does not exist – albeit, at different times – that is a very uncomfortable thought. However, it is true!

What makes that thought so uncomfortable is that when we focus our thinking on the fact that non-existence is inseparable from being a creature, our thinking is confronted with the tension between being and non-being. Only time separates the existence of creatures from their non-existence, converting an unthinkable contradiction into a fact which not only can be thought, but which also is a fact from which thought cannot escape without losing understanding's grasp of reality.

But the flip side of those reflections is that thinking can recognize that it is only the temporality of things which prevents its having to think what cannot be thought – that is, to think that contradiction. Recognizing that renders it possible to think of that which transcends the limitations of space and time, and when that is thought through it becomes evident that that which is transcendent could not be thought not to exist. Negating that negation reveals that something exists whose existence is so positive and powerful that it can create and sustain every other being. As Gregory Schufreider puts it:

> Such an approach is not only designed to clear those beings out of the way of reason's sight, but aims to redirect its attention to what cannot be thought not to exist against which all other beings appear to be in absolute contrast in their ontological nothingness. In that event, rational thought is left with nothing to think but God insofar as creatures disappear from sight as they withdraw into nonbeing.[11]

Here we confront the most challenging aspect of Anselm's proof. It challenges us to take seriously the fact that everything other than the Creator of all other things can be thought not to exist, for at some time they do not exist. Thinking through the implications of that fact, which is confirmed by modern cosmology, impels thought beyond the cosmos itself to recognize the existence of a being who exists most truly and most greatly of all. For Anselm has discerned that thinking – sensitive but rigorous thinking which does not shirk the task of exploring the limits of what can be thought – is the way to come to some

11 Schufreider, 'The Ono-Theo-Logical Nature', p. 464.

understanding of that which God is. Indeed, the uniqueness of Anselm's proof rests ultimately upon his recognition that acts of thinking provide the *only* way of coming to some understanding of that which God is.

I argued in §13.3 above that thinking cannot be entirely disconnected from the reality of the universe of space and time. Nevertheless, it is able to transcend the spatial and temporal character of everything in the universe. Thereby it is possible for any mind to be led to understand how truly something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, and therefore why only the Creator of all other things could be that thing. Having understood that, Anselm presents his proof which dares us to identify that transcendent thing as the God described in the Nicene Creed. That is the profound truth which is confusedly misrepresented by attributing 'the ontological argument' to him.

But that is as far as reasoning can take us. For reasoning cannot compel belief. While that conclusion cannot be gainsaid, a further step, of a kind which reasoning alone cannot deliver, is required to say, with Anselm, "And this is You, Lord our God". For, as he is drawing his three-stage argument for the existence of God to its proper close in *Proslogion* IV, he resumes his prayer writing:

> *I give thanks to You, good Lord, I give thanks to You, because what I first believed by your gift, I now understand by Your illumination in such a way that even if I should not want to believe it, I would not be able not to understand that You exist.*

It would be a serious mistake to interpret this prayer of thanksgiving as an expression of the triumph of understanding over faith. Instead, Anselm has recognized that his reason has been illuminated by the God in whom he believes so that he now believes with such clear understanding that the subjectivity of his desires and wishes are not strong enough to make him withhold rational assent. Whether we take that final step with Anselm, and, like him, address our thoughts and prayers to "You, Lord our God" requires 'a leap of faith'. But Anselm has shown how committing oneself by taking such a leap is not irrational, for it is possible to believe *with* understanding.

5 The Limits of Understanding

Anselm's quest, however, is driven by more than demonstrating all that he specified that his *unum argumentum* would do. It was always a means to a larger end. In *Proslogion* XIV, Anselm pauses his prayer to ask himself:

> *My soul, have you found what you sought? You sought God, and you have found that He is that, the highest of all things, than which nothing better can be thought, and that this is life itself, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal blessedness and blessed eternity, and that it exists everywhere and always.*

That he had found that God to be the highest, than which nothing better can be thought, is what he had established in the second half of *Proslogion* III. He then deploys the thesis that "You are whatever it is better to be than not to be" to infer in *Proslogion* VI to XIII that God is:

- Perceptive, although He does not have a body;
- Omnipotent, although He cannot do everything;
- Merciful, although He does not feel compassion;
- Just, although He spares the wicked;
- The life by which He lives;
- Alone limitless and eternal, although other spirits are also unlimited and eternal.

Some of these inferences are more plausible than others. However, finding all of the above is not enough to fulfil all that Anselm had hoped for when he set out on his quest. For he immediately asks himself some very troubling questions which presuppose that he has *not* found God. Once again he pauses his prayer to address his own soul:

> *If you have not found God, how is He this which You have found and which you have understood Him to be with such certain truth and true certitude? If you have truly found Him, how is it that you have not experienced what you have found? Why does my soul not experience You, Lord God, if it has found you?*

Schufreider comments:

> Here we encounter a strange confession, which might be regarded not just in P14 but in the chapters to follow, as the confessions of a rational mystic. For it is clear what Anselm seeks and yet has not found, namely, an experience [*sentio*] of God. And the problem this raises is not just why one should seek God if He cannot be found but, more specifically, why one should pursue this sort of contemplation *sola ratione* if it does not bring one to what is apparently expected to be the point of its undertaking, namely, a mystical vision.[12]

12 Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic*, p. 210.

Anselm continues asking further questions along this line, probing how he could have understood anything about God except through His light and truth. He suggests that maybe the solution is that his soul "*has seen You to some extent, but has not seen You as You are*".

That leads him to contrast the smallness and narrowness of his own soul with the immensity and breadth of God. That very contrast provides a way out of the predicament in which he has found himself. Instead of nursing his disappointment at not having experienced God, he sees in the immensity and breadth of God:

> *For how great is that light from which springs forth every true thing which gives light to the rational mind. How broad is that truth in which everything which is true exists, and outside which there is only nothing and falsehood.*

Continuing in this vein, he ends this expansive eulogy with:

> *What purity, what simplicity, what certainty and splendour is there! Certainly, more than can be understood by a creature.*

It seems that his quest for understanding has reached its limit. Yet recognizing that there is more to God than can be understood by a creature prompts him to present another argument. For at that limit, his *unum argumentum* gives yet another new insight. For he begins *Proslogion* XV by writing:

> *Therefore, Lord, not only are You* [that] *than whom a greater cannot be thought, but You are also greater than could be thought. For, since it can be thought that there is something of this sort* [huiusmodi]*, if You are not this very thing, it is possible to think of something greater than You – and this cannot be done.*

The nub of his argument is the supposition, "If You are not this very thing, it can be thought that something is greater than You". He immediately declares, "This cannot be done", because he has already proven, back in *Proslogion* III, that "You Lord, are [that] than whom a greater cannot be thought". So, it follows that, "It is not possible You are not this very thing". Since "this very thing" is something which is greater than can be thought, Anselm validly concludes that "It is necessary that You are something greater than can be thought".

When Anselm writes "It can be thought that there is something of this sort", what he means is that it can be thought that there is something which is greater than what thought can fully understand. As I have repeatedly emphasized,

when Anselm says that something can, or cannot, be thought, he is meaning that it can, or cannot, be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood. That is clearly what he is meaning here.[13]

That Anselm has reached the limit of what he is able to understand about God does not imply that he cannot understand these further beliefs. Quite the contrary! It is *because* he has understood that "*You are than which a greater cannot be thought*" that he understands that God is greater than can be thought. In the final sections of the *Proslogion* he draws out what has been implicit all along. For, as he said near the end of *Proslogion* 1, he does desire to understand to some extent God's truth which his heart believes and loves. His request for illumination has been answered, and it has enlightened his reason so that his understanding has reached the very edge of what can be thought and has given him a glimpse of a God who is even greater than can be thought.

What is remarkable about this argument is that Anselm has used a version of his '*unum argumentum*' – that "You are … than which a greater cannot be thought" – in order to come to understand that God must be this very thing which is greater than can be thought. However, it is not remarkable that Anselm recognizes that there is more to God than thought can fully comprehend. He knew that from the beginning; it is why he said, near the end of the prayer in *Proslogion* 1, that "I do not attempt to penetrate Your loftiness". That makes perfect sense.

While the verb "to understand" implies cognitive success – the mind has grasped the thing itself which is being thought – that does not preclude *mis*-understanding. I misunderstand something if I believe that I have understood it, but am wrong. It is also a feature of understanding that it admits of degrees. My understanding of someone or some topic can grow and deepen. That is obvious to anyone who reflects upon their life. In Chapter 4 I reviewed developments in cosmology over the past 100 years. But while I could not have written that review without some understanding of what cosmologists have discovered, I do not pretend to understand those theories at any depth. Again, I understand the people who are close to me, but I also understand that there is more to them than what I currently understand of them. So, I have no difficulty in understanding, with Anselm, that the God than whom a greater cannot be

13 Jacob Archambault in 'Monotonic and Non-monotonic Embeddings of Anselm's Proof', *Logica Universalis* (2017) argues at p. 133, that "the assumptions that God is both thinkable and greater than can be thought lead to the contradiction that God both is and is not greater than himself". But acknowledging that God is greater than what He is thought to be is no more contradictory than someone's saying, "I thought your yacht was larger than it is", to cite Russell's famous example. Likewise, God is greater than can be fully understood.

thought is greater than can be thought because his and our understanding of God falls far short of the fulness of His being.

There is no gainsaying the validity of the inference in *Proslogion* XV. Anselm's understanding has reached so far that it cannot reach any further. It is not limitless, for he is not God. But he is not retracting what he has been able to establish up to that point.

In the following chapter, *Proslogion* XVI, Anselm elaborates that conclusion by picking up a metaphor from his opening prayer, saying "*This, Lord, is the inaccessible light in which You dwell*". He likens it to the sun's light which enables him to see other things, but which he cannot look at directly.

> *It is not possible that my understanding is up to that. It shines too much,* [my understanding] *cannot grasp it, nor can the eye of my soul bear to focus its attention on it for long. It is driven back by its brightness, overcome by its breadth, shrouded by its immensity, bewildered by its capacity*.

When Anselm says that it is not possible that his understanding is "up to that", he is elaborating the point with which he finished *Proslogion* XIV. It is because God is greater than can be thought that He is more than can be understood by a creature. That is why the light in which God dwells is "inaccessible"; it shines too brightly for Anselm to be able to look at it. Anselm had set out on his quest buoyed by the hope that God would so illuminate his mind that he could come to understand what, initially, he merely believed. By the end of *Proslogion* IV he was able to give thanks to God for that gift. But he then surpasses that point, finding that his *unum argumentum* enables him to establish the credibility of so many of his beliefs. But now that same *unum argumentum* has entailed that there are limits to what thought is able to understand. So he ends *Proslogion* XVI with a paradox:

> *Oh supreme and inaccessible light, Oh complete and blessed truth, how far You are from me, who am so near to You. How distant are You from my sight, who am so present to Your sight*.

This leads into the second passage where Anselm breaks off his address to God. For in *Proslogion* XVIII he expresses his despair as he feels himself to be enveloped in darkness. But after bemoaning how sin has caused mankind, and himself, to fall so far from God, he beseeches God's help: "Lift me up from myself to You". So, he asks again,

> *What are You, Lord? What are You? How will my heart understand You? Indeed, You are life, You are wisdom, You are truth, You are goodness, You are blessedness, You are eternity, and You are every true good.*

Since these are so many that his narrow understanding cannot see them all in a single glance at the same time, he asks in *Proslogion* XIX, "*How then, Lord, are you all these?*" That leads him to infer that there are no parts in God, for what has parts can be broken up into those parts, either actually or by the understanding. But, he says, "Such things are foreign to You than whom nothing better can be thought". His *unum argumentum* is still legitimating his inferences. Developing that conclusion, he argues that God does not exist in space or time, and that He is before and beyond even all eternal things, as he says in *Proslogion* XX, where he argues that because they cannot exist without God, they can be *thought* to have an end, even though they do not.

Anselm then returns to the theme which underlay his proof in *Proslogion* II and III – that whatever does not exist, and whatever can be thought not to exist is not as great as what so exists that it could not be thought not to exist – to argue in *Proslogion* XXII that since God alone is what He is and who He is:

> *For that which is one thing in its totality and another in its parts, and in which something is changeable, is not entirely what is it. And what begins from non-being and can be thought not to be, and returns to non-being – if it does not subsist through another – and which has a past which now is not, and a future which is not yet, that thing does not exist properly and absolutely.*

Here, near the end, Anselm is explicitly articulating the underlying metaphysical principle upon which the whole of his reasoning in the *Proslogion* is based. That principle is what made it possible in this book to construct a cosmological reformulation of his proof of the existence of God.

His last inference also articulates what has been implicit from the beginning, that throughout he has been addressing the triune God. As I commented in §11.3, Anselm can address God in *Proslogion* XXIII as "You, God the Father" and affirm the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *because* the God whom he has proven to exist in *Proslogion* III is the God described by the Nicene Creed.

The last three chapters of the *Proslogion* are devoted to his exploring what this good is which is every and the one and the whole and the only good. The 'little book' finishes with Anselm's acknowledging that he has found "a kind of joy, which is full, and more than full". He writes:

> *I pray, God, that I may know You, and that I may love You, so that I may rejoice in You. And if I cannot do so in this life, may I advance daily right until that joy comes to fullness.*

But he acknowledges that his joy might not be full "*until I enter into the joy of my Lord*".

6 Understanding Spacetime as Permeated by an Eternal God

Amongst Anselm's many achievements, one of the less acclaimed is that he was the first to present a carefully argued analysis of the concept of eternity. In Chapter 9 my questioning the second premise in his *Reply* IV argument – that "*That alone cannot be thought not to exist, in which thinking finds neither a beginning nor an end, nor a conjunction of parts, but which it finds always and everywhere as a totality*" – led me to examine his struggles to understand eternity in the *Monologion*.

For he argued there that it is both necessary and impossible that the Supreme Nature exists everywhere and always. Rejecting neither, he sets about showing how those contradictory propositions may be interpreted in ways such that both are true. I presented in §9.4.4 a reformulation of the resolution he proposes which is free of contradiction. But here, in the closing section of this book, it is appropriate to reflect on the implications of the view of eternity he worked out. I begin these reflections by reviewing briefly how Anselm carried that analysis forward into the *Proslogion*.

By the end of *Proslogion* III he has established not only that God truly exists, but also that He has being most greatly of all. And in *Proslogion* V he has explicitly and validly inferred from his *unum argumentum* what was implicit in Stage Three of his proof: that God has made all other things from nothing. So, he is able to reiterate in *Proslogion* XIII what he had already worked out in the *Monologion*, but on a more secure footing:

> *Everything which is to some extent enclosed by space or by time is less than that which no law of space or time confines. Therefore, since nothing is greater than You, no place or time contains You, but You are everywhere and always. Since this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal.*

Anselm returns to the topic of God's eternity in *Proslogion* XIX by raising the issue he had already confronted in the *Monologion*:

> *But if, through Your eternity, You have been, and are, and will be, and to have been is not to be in the future, and to be is not to have been or to be in the future, in what way is Your eternity always a totality?*

As we saw, he answers that question by asking a different rhetorical question which suggests two ways of answering it:

> *Can it be that nothing of Your eternity passes away so that now it is not, nor will something be in the future as if it as yet is not? Therefore, You have not been yesterday, nor will You be tomorrow, but yesterday, today, and tomorrow You are. No rather, You are neither yesterday, nor today, nor tomorrow, but in an unqualified sense* [simpliciter] *You are, out of all time* [es extra omne tempus].

He now sees clearly that it is inappropriate to describe God as having a past, and a future, for that implies that He is extended in time, and he had argued in the previous chapter that there are no parts in God. So he repeats the point he had made in *Monologion* XXII: that the existence of God can only be described using the verb "*es*" [You are] tenselessly.

In what Anselm writes next he provides his own explanation of his claim that "In an unqualified sense You are out of all time":

> *For yesterday and today and tomorrow are nothing other than in time; yet, although nothing exists without You, You are not in a place or a time, but all things are in You. For nothing upholds You* [te continet]*, but You uphold* [contines] *all things*.

Anselm is here invoking the same verb "*continere*" which he invoked in *Monologion* XXII to resolve the contradiction he had generated in *Monologion* XX. I have already argued that it is both more appropriate and less misleading to translate "*continet*" as "upholds" than to translate it as "contains". He also repeats his reversal of that relation which obtains with respect to everything in the universe. Instead of saying that God is "upheld" in space and time, Anselm is proposing that God upholds everything which is in a place and a time.

I interpret Anselm to be arguing that while God's eternity is not describable in tensed language, He has an intimate relation to all those things which exist in spacetime. That is possible even though God's sustaining presence which permeates all of God's creatures cannot be the same as their way of existing. That that is what he means is confirmed by how he begins *Proslogion* XX, by concluding that:

> *Therefore, You fill up* [imples] *and comprehend* [completeris] *all things. You are before and beyond all things, because, before they were made, You are*.

That God 'fills up' and 'comprehends' all things is possible only if He permeates all things. As I read this passage, Anselm has not abandoned the conception of eternity which he developed so painstakingly in the *Monologion*. On the contrary, he is reiterating it with a new note of confidence resulting from his having proven in *Proslogion* III that God alone so truly exists that for anyone who understands that which God is it is inconceivable that He does not exist. And while Anselm says that "You are before and beyond all things, because, before they were made, You are", what he is meaning is that the Creator who permeates all spatiotemporal things also transcends them all. He is right to express his point in that way because, as was seen in §4.3, there are no times or places until the universe exists.

Undoubtedly, Anselm's account of time and eternity challenges our preconceptions. How could such a being be *present* at the different times and yet be timeless? If the Supreme Being is timeless, and if the flow of time is real, it is not surprising that many commentators try to render time and eternity *either* as both tenseless, *or* as both presentist. I examined in §9.4.6 Katherin Rogers's interpretation of Anselm's concept of eternity as timeless which leads her to attribute to Anselm an 'essentially tenseless view of time', which is quite paradoxical. On the other hand, John Marenbon says, "If God were timeless, then time would simply have nothing to do with him".[14] And David Smith comments that:

> Many today reject the very intelligibility of timeless existence, and most of those who do not reject it outright restrict its application to "abstract objects" such as numbers and propositions.[15]

It seems to me that all these views are confused. They are based on conflating timelessness, in the sense of the inapplicability of tenses and certain temporal adverbs, with assuming either that if things are genuinely temporal, they could not be present to a timeless God, and so could have nothing to do such a timeless being. The latter sense conjures up the image of something which is static: frozen in immobility. But that image is contradictory; immobility is

14 Marenbon, *'Anselm's Proslogion'*, p. 187.
15 Smith, *Anselm's Other Argument*, p. 135.

a temporal concept, albeit a negative temporal concept. But that is to understand the relation of temporal things to a tenseless God the wrong way around. Anselm's position is that a tenseless God can be present to all temporal things because such a God is always and everywhere as a totality, and is therefore unchanged by being, in a certain way, at all places and times. I take that that is what Anselm means by saying that God is present always and everywhere "as a totality".

Provided timelessness is understood strictly as tenselessness – for that is how Anselm describes it – there is no reason why a being who is timeless *in that sense* cannot be related to all temporal things without being changed thereby. I submit that a moment's reflection is all that is required to dispel all the puzzlement about how there could be relations between what is spatiotemporal and what is tenseless. For a start, it is obvious that no-one today has the slightest difficulty in understanding that some truths are tenseless. For it makes no sense to ask: "*When* did 2 plus 3 equal 5?" All mathematical truths are tenseless. Yet it is also obvious that no-one has the slightest difficulty in counting spatiotemporal things using tenseless numbers. I can count the two apples and the three oranges in my fruit-bowl, and recognize that I have five pieces of fruit ready to eat.

That is quite unproblematic, even though those apples and oranges did not exist a few months ago, and will soon be consumed. Numbers are used to count many things which exist in different places and times without the numbers themselves being changed in any way. The five pieces of fruit in my fruit-bowl were in a different place – the local fresh food markets – at a different time: yesterday. While the fruit has been moved, that had no effect on the number five.

Likewise, it makes no sense to ask: "In which place, and at what time, does the Supreme Being exist?" Since time is defined in relation to changes, a being which is so complete that nothing else could make it change can be present while changes are occurring with respect to everything else. For that is also true of numbers. That is how Anselm relates eternity and time. Such a tenseless God can have an effect on spatiotemporal things, especially if He is understood to be more powerful than we can imagine.

That is also how Anselm makes sense of Boethius' struggles to explain how eternity "is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life".[16] While Anselm's speaking of that which is always and everywhere has

16 Boethius, "*Aeternitas igitur est interminabilis uitae tota simul et perfecta possession*", *The Consolation of Philosophy*, v, vi, 4.

strong echoes of Boethius' *tota simul*, he explains its relationship to time as one of comprehending all times, not as entirely independent of temporality, provided we are careful not to narrow the signification of the word "temporal" so that it describes only those things which exist only for a limited time.

I submit that Anselm holds neither that both time and eternity are timeless, nor that only the present is real, so that God can perceive all that is in the present. As I understand the relevant texts, he maintains throughout his life the third alternative we saw him develop in the *Monologion*, which is different both from God's being everlasting and also different from a being whose mode of existence is not only tenseless, but also who surveys a tenseless universe. This third alternative understands God's eternity to be a mode of existing which is tenseless, but which, for that very reason, can be everywhere and always as a totality in His distinctive way of being tenselessly present.

I submit that this third alternative is Anselm's understanding of eternity. As he had so carefully worked out in *Monologion* XXII, *in* no place or time is God properly said to exist, since He is upheld by no other at all. And yet it may be said of Him that, in His own certain way, He exists in every place and time, since everything which exists in the universe is sustained by His presence, lest it lapse into nothingness. God is tenselessly present permeating everything in time and space ensuring their continued, although limited, existence. I submit that Anselm is correct in maintaining that there is nothing contradictory in this account. He has succeeded in dissolving the contradiction which threatened the very concept of eternity. While everything in the universe is properly described by verbs in the past, present, and future tenses, God tenselessly exists always and everywhere as an unchangeable totality.

This conception of time and eternity is the only one which is compatible with modern cosmology, which is based on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. As we saw in Chapter 9, spatiotemporal locations can be distinguished only relative to other spatiotemporal locations. So, there is no absolute viewpoint from which the universe can be observed – neither a so-called 'God's eye view' which is independent of spacetime, nor a present which is simultaneous everywhere. Both 'eternalism' and 'presentism' are impossible. As the theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli points out, the universe has a temporal structure which describes becoming. But this structure is not a simple separation into an objective past, present and future.[17]

Since this account of spacetime is well confirmed by observations, there is only one way in which God could know everything: He must be *at* – although

17 Carlo Rovelli, 'Neither Presentism nor Eternalism', *Foundations of Physics* 49(12), 2019 p. 1325.

not *in* – every spatiotemporal location. That is precisely the conception of eternity which Anselm worked out eight and a half centuries before Einstein revolutionized how we think of space and time. It turns out that Anselm was remarkably prescient.

This disposes of another metaphysical puzzle. While there is a radical difference between God and His creation, this third alternative is not dualistic. Anselm is not positing two opposed realms each comprehensive in itself. The tenseless presence of God in every place and time, in His own distinctive way, ensures that there is no *opposition* between the Creator and His creation. The sense in which creatures are distinct from God is as clear as is their dependence upon Him.

God, according to Anselm, *transcends* the universe because He created it and is neither identical with the universe itself, nor is He one of the things in it. Everything which comes to exist at some time depends on God both for the fact that it exists and that it continues to exist for some period. But God is also *immanent* within the universe, for He is present always and everywhere without being either extended or confined to any period or distance.

That implies that God permeates all things, including you and me. I suggest that it is not too fanciful to suggest that because God is the Creator of the universe, He is the *source* of all the energy manifest in it, and that it is because He is changeless in the sense just described that energy is always conserved through every interaction which occurs in the universe, as the First Law of Thermodynamics says.

I find Anselm's understanding of God to be both very familiar and yet startlingly novel. Church catechisms standardly ask the question: "Where is God?" and answer: "God is everywhere". That trite answer has become so much more meaningful as we have followed Anselm's reasoning through the highs and lows of his search for understanding as he crafted arguments which would give him some insight into who God is and what He is. The God who has revealed Himself to Anselm exists eternally. But far from being remote in heaven, that God is the Creator who permeates the universe He has created and everything in it. Whether we believe in Him, or not, and whether we are conscious of His presence, or not, the God who has illuminated Anselm's understanding is closer to us than breathing.[18] For God is the Supreme Being in whom "we live, and move, and have our being".[19]

18 Psalm 34:38.

19 Epimenides, c. 600–700 BC, *Cretica*. According to Acts 17:28, it was quoted by St Paul in a speech he delivered on the Areopagus in Athens.

APPENDIX A

Validating Anselm's Claim That It Is Greater to Be in Reality than Not

In both Stages One and Two Anselm attaches a comment to the main clause of a sentence he has written. In *Proslogion* II, he asserts:

> *For if it* [i.e., that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *is solely in the understanding, it can also be thought to be in reality, which is greater*.

There has been much debate about how Anselm justifies the comment, "which is greater". Clearly, he has some reason for asserting it, but nothing in the *Proslogion* tells us what that reason might be. Rather than trying to formulate some criteria for applying that concept, most commentators assume that what is required is some unstated background premise. So they invent a premise, doubly universal in form, to justify inferring either that something which exists, or is thought to exist, would be greater than if it were solely in the understanding.[1] None of these proposals are acceptable because they are all *ad hoc*. Nor are they necessary.

Anselm thought it unnecessary to say anymore than, "which is greater" because he understood that to come to think of something than which nothing greater could be thought is to think of something which is thought to exist. He made that clear in the passage in *Reply* VIII which was introduced in §2.5. Nothing bizarre is required to demonstrate that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought would be greater if it were in reality than if it were not. All that is required is to articulate the relation of "greater than" in a definition, and supplement it with what is implicit in the mental ascent described in *Reply* VIII: that to be in reality is good. It is, however, important to recognize that Anselm is comparing that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *with itself*, in the two different circumstances:

(*a*) That it is *solely* in the understanding;
(*b*) That it is also in reality, as can be thought.

To prove that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be greater if it were in reality than if it were not, that comparison must be expressed in a way which is not contradictory. That can be done if we introduce two different ways of referring to this

1 Graham Oppy (1995), pp. 9–10, has identified 15 different proposals for what that background premise might be!

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thing, just as "the Morning Star" and "The Evening Star" refer to the same thing, the planet Venus.

So, let "*a*" be introduced as a name which refers to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. To make the justification of Anselm's comment easier to follow, let us assume a second name, "*a*+" be used to refer to that same thing if it were in reality, as can be thought. Both names refer to that same thing, but since Anselm supposes that "*a*" is solely in the understanding, the second name "*a*+" is needed to refer to the same thing as if it were in reality, as can be thought.

It is important to recognize that "*a*" and "*a*+" are two different *names*, not shorthand for two different definite descriptions, because the logic of Anselm's argument requires "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought" to be a referring expression. However, if both were described as "that than which a greater cannot be thought" those descriptions would be contradictory. Since those two names refer to that same thing, in order clearly to differentiate between them, and avoid contradictory descriptions, I propose to describe *a* as "It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*" and *a*+ as "It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+".

Of course, if *a* is solely in the understanding, the positive predicate "is in reality" is not true of it. But the only difference between *a* and *a*+ is whether that thing to which both names refer is in the circumstance (a) or the circumstance (b). But if it were in reality, *a* and *a*+ would have the same predicates.

Accordingly, I propose the following implicit definition of "*a*+":

(1) It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+ if, and only if, it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*, and *a*+ is in reality, and if *a* were in reality, then the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+.

Those two names, and the definition (1), makes it possible to compare that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought if *a* is solely in the understanding with how that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought would be if it were in reality, as can be thought. So, let us assume that:

(2) It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+, and *a*+ is in reality, and if *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+.

Two of the conjuncts in (2) can immediately be extracted:

(3) *a*+ is in reality.
(4) If *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+.

Now, at this stage Anselm has assumed that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality, because he has assumed that it is solely in the understanding. But since we have two ways of referring to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, to ensure that there is no ambiguity that supposition is appropriately expressed as:

(5) It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*, and *a* is not in reality.

Conjoining (3) and the second clause in (5) yields:

(6) *a*+ is in reality and *a* is not in reality.

In §3.3 a definition of 'greater than' was introduced, based on Anselm's account in *Reply* VIII. It is:

(7) Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x*, and some positive, primitive, predicate *F*, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, and is true of *x* but not of *y*.

That is what this inference requires, not some missing premise. Although that definition is also doubly universal, unlike all the alleged hidden premises, it is quite general in nature and does not even mention 'being in reality', and so is not *ad hoc*.

I argued in §3.3 that the meaning of Kant's dictum – that "exists" is not a 'real predicate' – is that whether or not a thing exists makes no difference to *what the thing itself is*. He explains that what he is calling a "real predicate" is any predicate which does not determine what something is. Accordingly, the predicate "is in reality" is a predicate of a kind different from those predicates which determine what a thing is.

Of course, whether things are in reality, or not, does not affect what they are, although if they are in reality, that makes a significant difference in many other respects. In many cases, it would be better if they were in reality than if they were not. We also saw in §3.3 that implicit in the mental ascent by which anyone with a rational mind can come to form the concept of something than which a greater cannot be thought is the premise:

(8) *Ceteris paribus*, to be in reality is good.

Because this premise ascribes the property of being good to the property of being in reality, being good is a second-order property. For that reason, (8) is not saying that every existing thing is good. When some specific case is under consideration this principle has to be weighed against other relevant circumstances. That is the force of the

qualification "*ceteris paribus*". No special claims are being made here about being in reality, other than it is good. I argued in §3.3 that there is virtually universal agreement amongst all peoples, in all cultures, that in general it is good to be in reality.

Since Anselm is comparing that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought with itself under those two opposed assumptions, it is appropriate to instantiate the definition (7) accordingly:

(9) *a*+ is greater than *a* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *a* are mutually realizable and are true of *a*+, and "is in reality" is a positive, primitive, but non-determining predicate which it is good to be, and is true of *a*+, but not of *a*.

Considering the comparison which Anselm is making, the only difference between *a* and *a*+ is that Anselm has supposed that *a* is solely in the understanding, but has validly argued that it can be thought to be in reality, as *a*+ has been defined to be. In all other respects, *a* and *a*+ are exactly the same. That is made clear by the assumption (2), once (5) has also been assumed. For the following is a logical truth:

(10) If *a*+ were in reality and *a* is not in reality, and if *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+, then all the *positive and primitive* predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+, but not all the predicates which are true of *a*+ would describe *a*.

It is true that not all the predicates which are true of *a*+ describe *a* because it has been assumed that *a*+ is in reality, but *a* is not in reality, as (6) says. But assuming (3) and (5) does not rule out the implication that all the *positive and primitive* predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+. That is because "is not in reality" is a *negative* predicate, and it follows from the combination of (4) and (6) that the only difference between *a* and *a*+ is that *a*+ is in reality whereas *a* is not.

It follows from (6) and (10), by *modus ponens*, that:

(11) If *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+, then all the *positive and primitive* predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+, but not all the predicates which are true of *a*+ would describe *a*.

It then follows from (4) and (11), also by *modus ponens*, that:

(12) All the *positive* and *primitive* predicates which describe *a* are true of *a*+, but not all the predicates which are true of *a*+ describe *a*.

Since (12) is a conjunction, the first conjunct may be extracted. That is:

(13) All the *positive* and *primitive* predicates which describe *a* are true of *a*+.

That is still the case, despite its having been assumed that *a* is not in reality, because *a* does not acquire any new positive and primitive predicates from not being in reality. Moreover, it is a logical truth that:

(14) If *a*+ is in reality then all the positive and primitive predicates which describe *a* are mutually realizable and are true of *a*+.

Since (3) says that *a*+ is in reality, it follows from (3) and (14) that:

(15) All the positive and primitive predicates which describe *a* are mutually realizable and are true of *a*+.

So, the first condition in (9) is satisfied. Deducing (15) has established that *a* and *a*+ are things of the same sort, and that in no respect is *a* better than *a*+.

As for the second condition in (9), it is a logical truth that:

(16) "Is in reality" is a positive, primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate.

That "is in reality" is a positive, primitive predicate does not need justification; it is obvious.

Conjoining (16) with the premise (8) yields:

(17) "Is in reality" is a positive, primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, but to be in reality is something which it is good to be.

Since it has already been noted on line (6) that *a*+ is in reality, and *a* is not in reality, conjoining (6) and (17) yields:

(18) "Is in reality" is a positive, primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, but to be in reality is something which it is good to be, and is true of *a*+, but not of *a*.

The deduction of (18) shows that the second condition in (9) is satisfied. Since (15) and (18) respectively satisfy each of the conditions in (9) it is appropriate to conjoin them:

(19) All the positive, primitive predicates which describe *a* are mutually realizable and are true of *a*+, and "is in reality" is a positive, primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, and is true of *a*+, but not of *a*.

(19) satisfies the conditions prescribed in (9), which is an instantiation of the definition (7). So, it follows from (9) and (19), by *modus ponens*, that:

(20) *a*+ is greater than *a*.

That consequence is dependent upon the assumption (2), the supposition (5), and the two premises (7) and (9). The dependence of (20) upon (5) many be discharged by inferring from (5) and (20), by Conditional Proof, that:

(21) If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a* and *a* is not in reality, then *a*+ is greater than *a*.

The assumption (2) may now be discharged. It follows from (2) and (21), by Conditional Proof, that:

(22) If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+ and if *a*+ is in reality, and if *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+, then if *a* is that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought but is not in reality, then *a*+ is greater than *a*.

So, it has been proven that when that-than-which-a-greater cannot-be-thought is referred to in those two different ways, *a*+ is greater than *a*. But that is not exactly what Anselm claims in *Proslogion* II, that:

> For if it [i.e., that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] *is solely in the understanding, it can also be thought to be in reality, which is greater.*

There is no suggestion in that sentence of a distinction between "*a*" and "*a*+". Now "*a*+" was introduced on line (1) above as a way of exploring how Anselm's comment, "which is greater", could be justified. To recall, *a*+ was implicitly defined by the following mutual entailment:

(1) It cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+ if, and only if, it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*, and *a*+ is in reality, and if *a* were in reality, then the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+.

Since (22) has now been deduced, *a*+ is no longer required; the references to it in (22) may be discharged. As an intermediate step, since (1) says that "If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+, then if *a* were to exist, then the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+", it follows from (1) and (22), by Hypothetical Syllogism, that:

(23) If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+ and if *a*+ is in reality, and if it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*, and *a* is not in reality, then *a*+ is greater than *a*.

The clause, "if *a* were in reality, the same predicates which describe *a* would be true of *a*+" was significant when it was asserted as part of the assumption (2), for when it was extracted as (4), it enabled the deduction of (13). But once (5) and (2) are brought together to form the antecedent of (22), the deduction of (23) from (1) and (22) shows that that clause is already implied by the definition of "If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a*+".

However, since both "*a*" and "*a*+" were introduced as ways of referring to the very same thing – that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought – the definition (1) enables the removal of all mention of both *a* and *a*+ in (23), since (23) is equivalent to:

(24) If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality.

Since the different assumptions (*a*) and (*b*) are expressed hypothetically in (24), that significant sub-conclusion is dependent upon only the premises (7) and (8), neither of which mention "that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought". So, all that is required to deduce (23) and (24) are the definition of "Greater Than", (7), and the premise (8) – that, "*Ceteris paribus*, to be in reality is good".

While some of the steps in the deduction of (23) have been somewhat complicated, (24) shows that when Anselm wrote the three-word comment, "which is greater", his remark was justified. Despite all the confusions and controversy that comment has generated, and all the objections levelled at it, it has been proven if that-than-whic h-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, as can be thought, it would be greater than it would be if it were not.

Generalizing *a*+ in (23) yields:

(25) If it cannot be thought that something is greater than *a,* and *a* is not in reality, then something is greater than *a*.

Since (25) asserts that if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought in not in reality, something is greater than it, applying his Distributing Conceivability rule to (25) yields:

(26) If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality, it can be thought that something is greater than it.

Since it is not possible that something can be thought to be greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, Anselm can easily deduce his Stage One conclusion from (26).

APPENDIX B

The Deduction of the Three Stages of the Cosmological Reformulation of Anselm's Proof

The Rules

"And" Elimination (&E) From "*p* and *q*" it is valid to infer "*p*" and to infer "*q*".

"And" Introduction (&I) From "*p*" and "*q*" it is valid to infer "*p* and *q*".

Conditional Proof (CP) When "*q*" is deduced from X which includes an assumption "*p*", it is valid to infer "If *p* then *q*", dependent on all the propositions in X other than *p*.

Constructive Dilemma (CD) From "*p* or *q*" and "If *p* then *r*" and "If *q* then *s*", infer "*r* or *s*".

Double Negation (DN) From "not-not-*p*" dependent upon X, infer "*p*", dependent on X, and vice versa.

Equivalence (Equiv) From "*p*" deduced from X, infer "*q*", dependent on X, if and only if "*p*" and "*q*" are logically equivalent.

Hypothetical Syllogism (HS) From "If *p* then *q*" derived from X, and "If *q* then *r*" derived from Y, infer "If *p* then *r*", dependent upon X and Y.

Indefinite Description Elimination (IDE)[1] From an assumption or a proposition deduced from X, of the form "something is *F*", infer a conclusion "*q*" dependent on X and Y, provided all the following conditions are met:

(i) A new assumption is introduced with the form "*a* is *F*", where "*a*" is an arbitrarily chosen name of some individual thing which is *F*), and the deduction of "*q*" is dependent upon Y and that new assumption;

(ii) The conclusion "*q*" does not contain "*a*";

1 This rule is standardly called "Existential Elimination". That label imports a debatable metaphysical assumption that a proposition of the form "Something is *F*" is true if, and only if it exists. Importing that assumption into these arguments would rule out the possibility that some things do not exist at some time, which would be absurd. It is undoubtedly possible to infer what would follow from supposing that some predicate is true of some subject, when it is indeterminate whether anything of that sort actually exists. This rule does nothing more than prescribe when it is valid to reassert a conclusion which has been validly deduced from an assumption with a particular thing as its subject, as following from a proposition with an indefinite description as its subject. It is therefore less tendentious to call this rule, "Indefinite Description Elimination". Likewise, it is less tendentious to call the following rule "Indefinite Description Introduction".

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(iii) The deduction of "*q*" does not depend upon any other assumptions which contain "*a*".

Indefinite Description Introduction (IDI) From "*a* is *F*" derived from X, infer "something is *F*", dependent on X.

***Modus Ponens* (MP)** From "If *p* then *q*" derived from X, and "*p*" derived from Y, infer "*q*", dependent on X and Y.

***Modus Tollens* (MT)** From "If *p* then *q*" derived from X, and "not-*q*" derived from Y, infer "not-*p*", dependent on X and Y.

***Reductio ad absurdum* (RAA)** From "If *p*, then not-*p*", infer "Not-*p*".

Substitution (Subst) From a proposition of the form "a is *F*" and a proposition of the form "*a* is identical to *b*", infer "*b* is *F*".

Universal Elimination (UE) From "Every *x* is *F*" derived from X, infer "*a* is *F*", dependent on X, where *a* is a particular instance of all those things which are *F*.

Universal Introduction (UI) From "*a* is *F*" derived from X, infer "Everything is *F*", dependent on X, provided "*a*" does not occur in any proposition in X.

It is evident from his argument that Anselm is also using seven rules of inference which deploy modal operators. Five of these are standardly recognized in modern modal logic. The one exception is R2, which also validates R2*. This is Anselm's Conceivability Rule, which is his own variant of R1, and seems equally valid. These additional rules are:

R1 From "*p*", infer "It is possible that *p*".

R2 From "It is possible that *p*", infer "It is possible to think that *p*" [i.e., "It can be thought that p"]. I call this Anselm's Conceivability rule.

R2* From "If *p*, then *q*", infer "If it can be thought that *p*, then it can be thought that *q*". I call this Anselm's Distributing Conceivability rule.

R2** From "It cannot be thought that *a* is *F*", infer "It is not possible that *a* is *F*", or "*a* is unable to be *F*". This is the contrapositive of Anselm's Conceivability rule.

R3 "It is not possible that not-*p*" is equivalent to "It is necessary that *p*" and to "It is necessarily true that *p*". Since "*potest*" means both "is possible" and "is able", "… is unable not …" is equivalent to "necessarily is …".

R4 From "It is necessary that *p*" infer "*p*", and from "*a* is unable not to be *F*" infer "*a* is *F*".

R5 From "It is necessary that *p*" and "If *p*, then *q*" if it is a necessary implication, infer "It is necessary that *q*".

4 The Cosmological Reformulation: Stage One

4.6 *Existing Contingently*

1	(1)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.	Factual Premise
2	(2)	Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.	Quasi-Def: "having a beginning"
1,2	(3)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.	1,2 MP
	(4)	Anything both exists and does not exist if, and only if, it exists at some time, and does not exist at some other time.	Conceptual Truth

4.7 *What Exists Contingently Is Greater When It Exists than When It Does Not*

5	(5)	Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x,* and some positive and primitive predicate *F,* which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y.*	Def. "greater than"
6	(6)	*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.	Premise
5	(7)	Anything is greater at some time than at some other time if, and only if, all the positive and primitive predicates which describe it when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it exists, and "exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, and which is true of it when it exists, but not when it does not exist.	5 UE

(*cont.*)

	(8)	If anything exists at some time, but not at some other time, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe it when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist.	Logical truth
1,2	(9)	All the positive, primitive predicates which describe every observable thing which exists in the universe when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist.	3,8 MP
	(10)	"Exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.	Logical truth
6	(11)	"Exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate but which it is good to be, and which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.	6,10 &I
1,2,6	(12)	All the positive, primitive predicates which describe every observable thing which exists in the universe when it does not exist are mutually realizable and are true of it when it does exist, and "exists" is a positive and primitive predicate which is not a determining predicate but which it is good to be and which is true of anything when it exists, but is not true of it when it does not exist.	9,11 &I
1,2,5,6	(13)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.	7,12
1,2,5,6	(14)	Whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.	4,13 HS

4.8 *Deducing Anselm's Stage One Conclusions*

	(15)	Anything is in reality if, and only if, it exists.	Conceptual Truth
1,2,5,6	(16)	Whatever is in reality at some times, but is not in reality at some other times, is greater at those times when it is in reality than it is at those times when it is not in reality.	14,15 HS
1,2,5,6	(17)	If that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, but is not in reality at some other times, it is greater at those times when it is in reality than it is at those times when it is not in reality.	16 UE
18	(18)	There are times when that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality.	Assume for MT
1,2,5,6,18	(19)	If that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, then it is greater at those times when it is in reality than it is at some other times.	17,18 MP
1,2,5,6,18	(20)	If it can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality at some times, then it can be thought to be greater at some times than it is at some other times.	19 R2*
	(21)	It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.	Conceptual Truth shown in §3.4
	(22)	It is possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.	15,21 HS
23	(23)	It is possible that *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.	Assume for IDE
23	(24)	It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is in reality.	23 R2
1,2,5,6,18,23	(25)	It can be thought that that-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is greater at some times than it is at some other times.	20,24 MP
1,2,5,6,18,23	(26)	It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not as great at some times than it is at some other times.	25 Equiv

(*cont.*)

	(27)	If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not as great at some times than it is at some other times, then it is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
1,2,5,6,18,23	(28)	That-than-which a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	26,27 MP
1,2,5,6,23	(29)	If there are times when that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.	18,28 CP
	(30)	It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
1,2,5,6,23	(31)	It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not in reality at some times.	29,30 MT
1,2,5,6,23	(32)	It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *always* in reality.	31 R3
1,2,5,6,23	(33)	It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.	32 IDI
1,2,5,6	(34)	It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is always in reality.	22,23,33 IDE
1,2,5,6	(35)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *always* in reality.	34 R4
1,2,5,6	(36)	It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not one of the observable things in the universe.	3,35 HS

4.9 *Deducing a Stronger Version of Anselm's Stage One Conclusion*

1,2	(37)	Something exists which does not exist at some time.	3 IDI
	(38)	Whatever does not exist is able not to exist.	Logical Truth
	(39)	Whatever is unable not to exist exists.	38 Equiv
	(40)	Whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time.	37,39 &I

(*cont.*)

1,2,5,6	(41)	Whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time, and whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist.	14,40 &I
	(42)	If whatever is unable not to exist exists, and something exists which does not exist at some time, and whatever both exists and does not exist is greater at the times when it exists than it is at those times when it does not exist, then whatever is unable not to exist is greater than whatever is able not to exist.	Logical Truth
1,2,5,6	(43)	Whatever is unable not to exist is greater than whatever is able not to exist.	41,42 MP
1,2,5,6	(44)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were *unable* not to exist, it would be greater than if it were *able* not to exist.	43 UE
1,2,5,6	(45)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were *able* not to exist, it would not be as great as it would be if it were *unable* not to exist.	43 Equiv
1,2,5,6	(46)	If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *able* not to exist, it can be thought that it would not be as great as it would be if it were *unable* not to exist.	45 R2*
1,2,5,6	(47)	If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist, it can be thought that *something* is greater than it.	46 IDI
	(48)	If it can be thought that something is greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, then that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
1,2,5,6	(49)	If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is *able* not to exist, then that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	47,48 HS
1,2,5,6	(50)	It cannot be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist.	30,49 MT

(*cont.*)

1,2,5,6	(51)	It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is able not to exist.	50 R2**
1,2,5,6	(52)	It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	51 R3
1,2,5,6	(53)	It is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	52 IDI
1,2,5,6	(54)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	53 R4
1,2,7,6	(55)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.	54 R4

6 The Cosmological Reformulation: Stage Two

6.2 *Deriving the Premise of Stage Two from a Reformulated Stage One Conclusion*

1	(1)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.	Premise = (4:1)
2	(2)	Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything exists with a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but there is a previous time when it does not exist.	Premise = (4:2)
3	(3)	Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x,* and some positive, primitive, predicate *F,* which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y*.	Premise = (4:7)
4	(4)	*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.	Premise = (4:8)
1,2,3,4	(5)	It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	= (4:53)
6	(6)	It is necessary that *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	Assume for IDE
6	(7)	It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.	6 R4

(*cont.*)

6	(8)	It is not possible that that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.	7 R3
	(9)	Whatever is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which something is thought when the thing itself is understood.	Conceptual Truth shown in §3.7
	(10)	If it is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, then it cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.	Subst in 9
6	(11)	It cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist.	8,10 MP
6	(12)	That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which *could not* be thought not to exist.	11 Equiv
	(13)	If *p*, it can be thought that *p*.	Anselm's Conceivability Principle
6	(14)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist, then it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist.	12 Subst in 13
6	(15)	It can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is something which could not be thought not to exist.	12,14 MP
	(16)	If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.	6,15 CP
	(17)	If it is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.	16 IDI
1,2,3,4	(18)	If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.	5,6,17 IDE

6.3 *Deducing the Interim Conclusion of Stage Two*

19	(19)	If it is necessary that *that*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.	Assume for IDE
20	(20)	It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist.	Assume for CP
19,20	(21)	That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought to be something which could not be thought not to exist.	19,20 MP
	(22)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, it can be thought that it does not to exist.	Subst in 13
	(23)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it exists.	22 Equiv
3,4	(24)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought were in reality, it would be greater than it would be if it were not in reality.	= (App-A:24)
	(25)	Anything is in reality if, and only if it exists.	Conceptual truth, = (4:20)
3,4	(26)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists, it would be greater than it would be if it were not to exist.	24,25 HS
3,4	(27)	If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it is greater than it would be if it were not to exist.	23,26 HS
3,4	(28)	If it can be thought that that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, then it can be thought that it is greater than it would be if it can be thought not to exist.	27 R2*
3,4,19,20	(29)	It can be thought that that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought is greater than it would be if it can be thought not to exist.	21,28 MP
	(30)	If it can be thought that something is greater than that-than-which a greater-cannot-be-thought, then that thing itself [*id ipsum*] than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth

(*cont.*)

3,4,19,20	(31)	If it can be thought that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought does not exist, then that thing itself [*id ipsum*] than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought.	29,30 HS
	(32)	It is not possible that that thing itself than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
3,4,19,20	(33)	It is not possible that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.	31,32 MT
3,4,19,20	(34)	That-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist.	33 Equiv
3,4,19	(35)	If it is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.	20,34 CP
3,4,19	(36)	If it is necessary that *something*-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.	35 IDI
1,2,3,4	(37)	If it is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, then it could not be thought not to exist.	18,19,36 IDE
1,2,3,4	(38)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought *could not* be thought not to exist.	5,37 MP

6.4 *Deducing Anselm's Actual Stage Two Conclusion*

1,2,3,4	(39)	*Because* it is necessarily true that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.	37 Equiv
1,2,3,4	(40)	It is necessary that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is unable not to exist, and *because* it is necessarily true that it is unable not to exist, it could not be thought not to exist.	5,39 &I
1,2,3,4	(41)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.	40 Equiv

10 A Twofold Reformulation of Stage Three of Anselm's Proof

10.1 *Reviewing Stages One and Two*

1	(1)	Every observable thing which exists in the universe at some time has a beginning.	Premise = (4:1)
2	(2)	Setting aside the universe as a whole, anything has a beginning if, and only if, it exists at some time, but does not exist at any time before some previous time.	Quasi-definition = (4:2)
3	(3)	Anything *x* is greater than anything *y* if, and only if, all the positive, primitive predicates which describe *y* are mutually realizable and are true of *x*, and some positive, primitive, predicate *F*, which is not a determining predicate, but is a predicate which it is good to be, is true of *x* but not of *y*.	Def > = (4:5)
4	(4)	*Ceteris paribus*, to exist is good.	Premise = (4:6)
1,2,3,4	(5)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.	= (6:41)

10.2 *Establishing That Something Exists Supremely*

	(6)	If only one existing thing were something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it would exist supremely.	Conceptual Truth
	(7)	If it can be thought that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it exists supremely.	6 R2*
1,2,3,4	(8)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and if it can be thought that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it exists supremely.	5,7 &I

(*cont.*)

	(9)	It is possible that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
	(10)	It can be thought that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	9 R2
1,2,3,4	(11)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and it can be thought that it exists supremely.	8,10 MP
1,2,3,4	(12)	It can be thought that *something* exists supremely	12 IDI
13	(13)	*a* is something than which a greater cannot be thought and it so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist, and it can be thought that it exists supremely.	Assume for IDE
14	(14)	There exists another thing, which is not identical to *a*, but which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, *b*.	Assume for CP
13,14	(15)	There are two things, *a* and *b*, both of which are something than which a greater cannot be thought.	13,14 &I
	(16)	If there is more than one thing which is something than which a greater cannot be thought, it is not possible that any of them exists supremely.	Conceptual Truth
13,14	(17)	It is not possible that either *a* or *b* exists supremely.	15,16 MP
1,2,3,4,13,14	(18)	It can be thought that something exists supremely, but it is not possible that either *a* or *b* exists supremely.	12,17 &I
	(19)	To exist supremely is to exist most greatly of all.	Conceptual Truth
1,2,3,4,13,14	(20)	It can be thought that something is greater than both *a* and *b*.	18,19 HS
	(21)	It is not possible that something can be thought to be greater than something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.	Logical Truth

(*cont.*)

1,2,3,4,13	(22)	If there is another thing, which is not identical to *a*, but which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, *b*, then it can be thought that something is greater than both *a* and *b*.	14,20 CP
1,2,3,4,13	(23)	It is not possible that there is another thing, which is not identical to *a*, but which is also something than which a greater cannot be thought, namely, *b*.	21,22 MT
1,2,3,4,13	(24)	It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	13,23 HS
1,2,3,4	(25)	It is necessary that only one existing thing is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	11,13,24 IDE
1,2,3,4	(26)	It is necessary that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely.	6,25 MP
1,2,3,4	(27)	It is necessary that the only thing which is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought so truly exists that it could not be thought not to exist.	5,25 HS

10.3 *Deducing an Analogue of Anselm's Stage Three Premise*

1,2,3,4	(28)	Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought could not be thought not to exist.	= 6:38
1,2,3,4	(29)	It is not possible that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.	28 Equiv
1,2,3,4	(30)	It is not possible that something which cannot be thought not to exist is not something than which a greater cannot be thought.	29 Equiv
1,2,3,4	(31)	It is not possible that anything other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.	25,30 HS
1,2,3,4	(32)	It is necessary that *only* that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist.	31 Equiv

1,2,3,4	(33)	It is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.	32 Equiv

10.5 *Introducing a Constructive Dilemma to Justify Anselm's Stage Three Premise*

34	(34)	The God whom Anselm is addressing as "You, Lord our God" throughout the *Proslogion* is the triune God in whom all Christians believe and who is described by the Nicene Creed.	Factual Premise = (8:24)
	(35)	The triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.	Conceptual Truth
	(36)	*Either* the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, *or* it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.	Logical Truth

10.6 *Deducing Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise on Theological Grounds*

37	(37)	The triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.	Assume for CD
37	(38)	God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things, visible and invisible.	35,37 MP
	(39)	God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible if, and only if, God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.	Conceptual Truth
37	(40)	God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.	38,39 MP
37	(41)	Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, has been created by Him.	40 Equiv
	(42)	Whatever exists as a result of being created does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of intrinsic necessity.	Conceptual Truth
	(43)	Whatever does not have a nature which determines that it exists out of intrinsic necessity is able not to exist.	Logical Truth

(*cont.*)

	(44)	Whatever exists as a result of being created is able not to exist.	42,43 HS
37	(45)	Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, is able not to exist.	41,44 HS
37	(46)	Whatever exists, and is other than God the Father Almighty, can be thought not to exist.	45 R2
	(47)	What does not exist is able not to exist, and is able not to exist can be thought not to exist.	Logical Truth in *Reply* V
37	(48)	Whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	46,47 &I

10.7 *Deducing Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise on Cosmological Grounds*

49	(49)	It is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.	Assume for CD
49	(50)	It is false God the Father Almighty is the maker of heaven and earth, and of all [other] things visible and invisible.	38,49 HS
1,2,3,4,49	(51)	It is not possible that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	25,50 MT
1,2,3,4	(52)	Even if it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, it is necessary that whatever is other than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist.	33,49 &I

10.7.1 Deducing Anselm's Stage Three Premise Independently of the First Leg

	(53)	If it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things, it can be thought that He is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Conceptual Truth derived in §8.3

(*cont.*)

54	(54)	It can be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood, that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things.	Premise
54	(55)	It can be thought that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	53,54 MP
56	(56)	God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Assume for CP
1,2,3,4,56	(57)	God the Father Almighty is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.	25,56 HS
1,2,3,4,56	(58)	It is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	57 Subst 26
1,2,3,4	(59)	If God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	56,58 CP
1,2,3,4	(60)	If it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it can be thought that it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	59 R2*
1,2,3,4,54	(61)	It can be thought that it is necessary that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	55,60 MP
62	(62)	God the Father Almighty is *not* something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Assume for CP
1,2,3,4	(63)	It is not possible that anything other than that that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists supremely.	25,26 HS
1,2,3,4,62	(64)	It is not possible that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	62,63 HS
	(65)	What is impossible cannot be thought in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood.	Conceptual Truth (= 3:14)
1,2,3,4,62	(66)	It cannot be thought, in the way in which a thing is thought when the thing itself is understood that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	64,65 HS
1,2,3,4	(67)	If God the Father Almighty is *not* something than which a greater cannot be thought, then it cannot be thought that God the Father Almighty exists supremely.	62,66 CP

(*cont.*)

1,2,3,4,54	(68)	It is not possible that God the Father Almighty is not something than which a greater cannot be thought.	61,67 MT
1,2,3,4,54	(69)	It is necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	68 R3
1,2,3,4,54	(70)	It is necessary that God the Father Almighty is identical to that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.	25,69 HS
1,2,3,4,54	(71)	It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	70 Subst 33

10.7.2 Establishing That the Triune God Described in the Nicene Creed Exists

1,2,3,4,49,54	(72)	It is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	51,69 &I
1,2,3,4,54	(73)	If it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then it is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	49,72 CP
	(74)	It is not possible that it is both impossible and necessary that God the Father Almighty is something than which a greater cannot be thought.	Logical Truth
1,2,3,4,54	(75)	It is not possible that it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.	73,74 MT
1,2,3,4,54	(76)	It is necessarily true that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists.	75 R3

10.8 *Justifying Anselm's Crucial Stage Three Premise in the Strongest Possible Way*

1,2,3,4	(77)	If the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	37,48 CP

(*cont.*)

1,2,3,4,54	(78)	It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	76,77 R5
1,2,3,4,54	(79)	If the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then it is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	37,78 CP
1,2,3,4,54	(80)	If it is assumed that it is false that the triune God described by the Nicene Creed exists, then because it can be thought that God the Father Almighty is the Creator of all other things, not only is that assumption impossible, but also it is necessary that whatever is other than Him can be thought not to exist.	70 Subst 52,75 &I
1,2,3,4,54	(81)	It is necessary that whatever is other than God the Father Almighty can be thought not to exist.	36,79,80 CD
1,2,3,4,34,54	(82)	It is necessary that whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.	34,81 HS

10.9 *Deducing Anselm's Stage Three Conclusions*

1,2,3,4,34,54	(83)	It is necessary that You alone are something than which a greater cannot be thought.	29,82 HS
1,2,3,4,34,54	(83*)	This is You, Lord our God.	83 Equiv
1,2,3,4,34,54	(84)	It is necessary that You alone, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.	5,83 HS
1,2,3,4,34,54	(84*)	You, Lord my God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist.	84 Equiv
1,2,3,4,34,54	(85)	Necessarily, it is a distinctive property of God that He could not be thought not to exist.	34,84 HS
1,2,3,4,34,54	(86)	It is necessary that You alone, Lord our God, so truly exist that You could not be thought not to exist, and it is necessary that whatever is other than You can be thought not to exist.	82,84 &I
1,2,3,4,34,54	(87)	You alone have being most truly of all [*verissime omnium*], and for that reason most greatly of all [*maxime omnium*].	86 Equiv

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